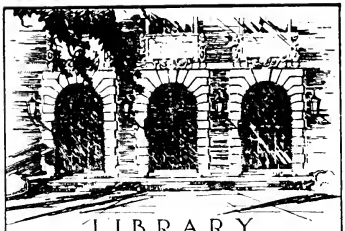

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A Novel.

BY

Katharine Wylde,

Author of

"Mr. Bryant's Mistake," etc.

In Three Volumes.

Vol. II.

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"The rising into place is laborious, and by pains men come to greater pains; and it is sometimes base, and by indignities men come to dignities. The standing is slippery, and the regress is either a downfall or at least an eclipse, which is a melancholy thing."

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THE PRINCESS ROYAL.

PART IV.

DEUS EX MACHINA—continued.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER that extraordinary scene, Tom went straight home to his father, and demanded to be told exactly what had passed between him and old Charles Turold a few days earlier.

"My lad, my dear lad, tell me first what he has said to you," said Mr. Palmer, anxiously.

"Why, he seems to be on our side! He consents, father."

"That's right! that's my work, Tom!" cried the other.

But when the son begged for explanation, he only said—

"I'd just as soon you didn't ask me, lad."

"I hate these riddles," said Tom, impatiently.

However, he was struck by Mr. Palmer's expression of affectionate concern, and hesitated in his catechism. Between him and his father the most perfect trust had always subsisted; so much so that the son at once felt it improper to press for information which Mr. Palmer was obviously unwilling to give. Nevertheless he made an effort. Was it some question of money? No doubt money was important, though for his own part he could be quite happy in a cottage. But why had the old man spoken as if he were somehow in Mr. Palmer's power?

"Father," said Tom, "if it were any one but you I should not like this. Have you lent him money, or what is it? I couldn't

court Lilith in that way; she and I must know all about it."

Mr. Palmer replied that buying the land upon which to build his house had been his only money transaction with Mr. Turold.

"Then how is he under an obligation to you?" asked Tom.

His father sighed heavily, and said if Tom insisted upon knowing he might ask Mr. Turold himself, who would very probably tell him. But it would be against the interest of those he loved, and would bring little happiness to himself. The son pondered. He hazarded a guess. Mr. Palmer had done some generous action according to his wont, which he wished kept secret? Well, was the son to trade on his father's generosity, to buy his sweet Lilith with it?

"I don't want to buy her with anything!" cried Tom. "It is fair neither on her nor on me."

"No, my boy, you are guessing wrong," replied Mr. Palmer, laying his hand gravely

on his son's shoulder. "I wish there was a question of generosity anywhere in the business. Tom, you may learn the facts sooner or later: I think you probably will; but I believe you will regret it. There are tales of evil conduct come into the story, and in some who are or who will be very near kin to you."

His gravity and that hint of disgrace, to fall on he knew not whom, silenced Tom for the present. Before now he had heard remarks from Mr. Palmer, especially in moments of agitation, which had occasioned him surprise; but they had never till to-day seemed important, and now he could not precisely remember them. To any one with a clue nothing is easier than to trace allusions; but without a clue it is hard even infallibly to recognize them.

After a few moments' thought, Tom said—

"I can trust you, father, I know, not to let me in for doing anything dishonourable, or even in any degree shabby."

"I will give you my word for that," cried the idealist, relieved by what seemed an acceptance of his silence. "If I saw you doing anything dishonourable I would stop you at once, at all costs to you or to myself. No; no one runs danger of being injured unless it's yourself; and my dear, dear boy, can't you trust me not to let *you* be injured, or cheated, or defrauded?"

Tom, though he raised his eyes still doubtfully, and perhaps with a slight demur about the invariable soundness of Mr. Palmer's judgment, pried no further; nor would filial honour allow him to seek from a stranger the information which his father was unwilling to give. He tried to think the mystery unimportant, and waited impatiently till he should learn the final decision of Lilith's father.

So old Mr. Turold, out of senile inertia, and Mr. Palmer, out of combined simplicity and ingenuity of mind, had drifted together into a plot, but without formal undertakings

on either side. Either might at any moment betray his accomplice; and yet each was so anxious for silence that their action was harmonious as that of well-tutored conspirators.

The only person Mr. Palmer consulted was his friend Sir Joseph Kidson, who had known the circumstances all along. Sir Joseph had his own views about Tom; more worldly wise than Jack Palmer, he had long ago found out that the son of Stephen Turold was now the heir of entail. He meant himself to reveal the facts if no one else did; but on no account yet; not till Tom Palmer (or Turold) was quite safely married to his own daughter, Grace, whom nature had cut out for a great lady. Such being Sir Joseph's plan, he was greatly disconcerted to hear that Tom had fallen in love with Lilith Turold. He instantly determined at all hazards to hinder that match. The young man had no right to throw Grace over when all her life he had next door to courted her, and the girl had

an obvious tenderness for him! Sir Joseph applauded Jack Palmer's plot, for in it he saw the best chance of hindering Tom's betrothal; once let him be proclaimed a Turold, and of course he would be married to the superseded heiress in a week, and all chance for Grace's promotion gone. There was some sort of hope in delay.

"Jack, you have acted with the greatest prudence," he said; and simple Mr. Palmer, satisfied that his friend approved, did not inquire into the grounds of his approbation.

Meantime, Gilbert Turold, though extremely discomposed by his father's extraordinary attitude, was by no means vanquished, as Lilith had fondly supposed. He walked over to Silcote Dene and himself visited the oil merchant, speaking to him in the tone almost of a suppliant; but he learned nothing. Mr. Palmer, who had not told Tom, had no intention of telling any one else; and he preserved his stony silence when the gentleman further dilated in very plain language on

the difference in rank between the lovers, and on the backstairs influence which had apparently been used with the old man, his father.

From Silcote Dene Gilbert retired discomfited, and he next went to Molesworthy and consulted Edward Vane, feeling that to him he owed some sort of apology. Edward listened to the story without moving a muscle of his face. Like Sir Joseph Kidson, he was inwardly resolving that somehow or other at all hazards he would hinder the match; yet aloud he argued in Tom's favour, and recommended that the betrothal should be permitted to take place, on the understanding that the marriage should not too speedily follow. It seemed to the unhappy Gilbert that the whole world had gone mad and joined in league against him.

"I thought you wanted to marry her yourself," cried Mr. Turold. "Upon my soul, Edward, your arguments astonish me no less than my father's."

"I wish to think of Lilith, not of myself,"

said Edward. "Don't smile, Gilbert. Surely between friends and in serious discussion it is permissible to drop the customary mask of selfishness and cynicism. As a matter of fact, none of us really govern our conduct by selfishness and cynicism. Why may we not now and then appear under our true colours?"

"I don't understand that sort of high-flown sentiment," said Gilbert, angrily. "I thought you professed to love the girl and to want her yourself?"

"You will find," said Edward with dignity, "that my love for Lilith is unchangeable."

Gilbert, very far from satisfied, but as usual impressed by Edward, hurried home, and next tried to get some comfort out of the family physician, Dr. Martin having been summoned to attend the old monarch, who continued weak in body, agitated and unreasonable in mind.

"He is in an excited condition," said the doctor, "and must on no account be contradicted or annoyed."

"His mind is going," pronounced Gilbert. "Are you of opinion that he is breaking up —dying, Dr. Martin?"

"No," replied the physician, surprised. "I think, with a humouring of all his wishes, and after a course of *my* treatment, he will revive and be spared to you for many months longer."

Gilbert sighed.

"And how is my pretty Miss Lilith?" said Dr. Martin, who had superintended Miss Turold's birth, vaccination, measles, and scarlet fever, and was nearly as proud of her as was her father himself. "I must be offering my congratulations, I suppose, for her grandfather tells me she is engaged."

Not even from the doctor could Gilbert derive assistance in this matter of Tom Palmer's suit.

He began to think of possible capitulation. The war was unfair. There had been treachery, and his foes were they of his own household.

CHAPTER VI.

THE few days of extra delay which followed were harder to Tom to bear than the previous week. A week is a thing with a definite ending. School-boy fashion he could count its hours; but now Mr. Turold had said "wait for the present," and who could know when the ending of the present might be? Did the "present" mean six hours or six days? six weeks or six months? And had he been seized by some curious malady of his brain, that each hour seemed now to stretch itself to the length of twelve?

Tom was grievously sick with impatience; but the person who found him thoroughly cross was Grace Kidson. She had invited

herself to Silcote Dene, and was, under the circumstances, decidedly in the way. Of course she had no idea of what was in the air; and she tormented Tom by talking to him of his sweetheart, whom she was pleased to consider as a disciple of her own.

"Miss Turold is less of a doll than I thought," said Grace. "I have had some interesting conversation with her. Eventually she may, I think, take up the question of Woman's status. Poor girl! Surrounded entirely by men and by Conservatives, she has to do her thinking unassisted, and naturally her present opinions are indefinite. Yet," said Grace, reflectively, "I cannot help envying her the grand opportunities of her position."

"Though she is surrounded by men and Conservatives?" yawned Tom.

"It is those who swim against the stream who command attention," said the enthusiast. "People never believe that I have adopted my views independently. Even Mr. Vane

says to me, 'that is natural in your father's daughter.'"

"I hate that chap Vane."

"I know you do. You should struggle against prejudice, Tom. Before I knew Mr. Vane, I was prejudiced myself, but now I have overcome it."

"I believe in prejudice, Grace. You can put no dependence on unprejudiced people. Prejudices are only habits of mind, and if a mind has no habits it has either no life or no experience, and it isn't a bit of use."

"Prejudiced people are ignorant and narrow."

"But they have instincts and insight; or they ought to have. Anyhow, I hate Edward Vane."

"He is Miss Turold's cousin, and he intends to marry her," observed Grace.

"I will bet you ten golden guineas, Gracie, that Miss Turold does not marry Edward Vane."

He laughed, and there was something in

his tone that made Grace look up, and her heart beat rather fast for a minute or two.

Though an opponent of prejudice, Grace had a few very strong habits of mind. One such was the habit of regarding Tom Palmer as in some curious way her own property; and she always felt offended when she heard of his flirting with or interesting himself in any other young lady. It had not occurred to this self-deceiving woman to ask how far jealousy of one individual man was consistent with resolutions of eternal spinsterhood. At the present moment she did not think it was good taste on Tom's part to speak so warmly of Miss Turold; but before she could reprove him, they were interrupted by Mr. Palmer's entrance from his laboratory, followed by a servant with a note for Tom.

The note was from Mr. Turold, and the gentleman himself was said to have brought it, and to have proposed returning in ten minutes for a reply.

Tom flushed and his fingers shook as he

broke the seal. Mr. Palmer came and read over his shoulder; himself so much agitated that he lost a blue paper he was carrying, which was really of great importance, being a record of the stage his experiments in the new preparation of paraffin had now attained. Grace watched the two men with fast-growing curiosity.

The letter ran thus :—

"My dear Sir,

"I have informed you with sufficient distinctness that I altogether disapprove of your suit to my daughter. Miss Turold has not chosen to obey me by herself declining the proposals you have made to her; and you have, by what I must stigmatize as undue influence, obtained her grandfather's consent to your engagement. Under these circumstances, I now ask you plainly if *you* will withdraw your pretensions and honourably decline to take advantage of a young girl's weakness and an old man's imbecility against the true interest of all parties. If you will consent to this step you will extricate us all from a most painful position, and you will have earned my hearty respect and gratitude. Believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"Gilbert Turold."

When they had both read this, Tom stood for a few minutes looking into his father's eyes as if silently consulting him. Then he wrote, Mr. Palmer reading the words as they dropped from his pen :

"DEAR SIR,

"I cannot believe that I should earn your respect by withdrawing now, and I must decline to do so. Mr. Turold's attitude has made no difference in my sense of responsibility to you, though it has given both Lilith and me more hope of eventually gaining your consent. Our course must depend upon your reply to this letter, in which I again formally ask you to give me your daughter for my wife."

"Tom," said Mr. Palmer, "that last sentence is ambiguous. Do you mean that you will accept his decision or not? Is it a threat, or a laying down of arms?"

"That is exactly what I do not wish to explain," said Tom.

"Well, sign it, and I'll carry it to Mr. Turold myself and bring back his answer," said Mr. Palmer, no less excited than Tom.

He left the room, resolving that if the man

still withheld his consent, he and the boy should at once learn the facts of the case.

Tom stood like a marble figure where he was, his head bent a little, as if his whole life had passed into his two listening ears.

"What is all this?" asked Grace Kidson; "what have you to do with the Turolds, Tom?"

He did not answer; and ten minutes passed, the silence in the room growing oppressive.

Lilith! Most certainly Tom had spoken of Lilith. Lilith meant Miss Turold; the child of the world; the doll. What had Tom to do with Lilith?

Grace had drawn nearer; but she was trying to look indifferent, and she had unconsciously picked up for a plaything the crumpled blue paper which Mr. Palmer had dropped.

Presently the old man returned with something very like a film over his kind eyes. He laid his hand on Tom's shoulder.

"My boy, he bade me tell you—these are his own words, Tom—that he ain't pleased, and that he hopes the marriage will never come off, and that it mustn't be thought of under six months, and that he'll hinder it if he can; but that to avoid open family dissensions, which he considers intolerable—they're his own words, Tom—he withdraws his formal refusal to your engagement."

"Why, then it's all right!" exclaimed Tom the sanguine, seizing his father's hand in the exuberance of his triumph. "I'll be off and tell Lilith at once!"

No one noticed that Grace slipped from the room; and she remained in concealment till the noisy luncheon summons brought her down as composed and serene as usual, and with a very nice little congratulatory speech ready composed for the bridegroom elect. No one knew that she had spent a most disagreeable hour in her privacy, and had gone through a mental conflict, after which she never really was quite the same girl she

had been before. That was it, was it? There was crisis in Tom's history, and *it had nothing whatever to do with her.* He was engaged to Lilith Turold. To Lilith Turold!

"An extremely unsuitable girl," thought Grace. "How I wish he had let *me* choose for him!"

That was her reflection when she went upstairs first and was still under the delusion that Tom was merely her friend, her old comrade, in a sense her disciple. Before the luncheon gong sounded, she knew a very great deal better. She had thought of Tom as her own property, to be kept or to be thrown aside as she chose, because—*because she had imagined he loved her;* because (this was very humiliating—Grace, the ardent spinster, fought against the idea as hard as ever she could but was not able to escape from it), *because she loved him;* because all this time she had been just like all the other silly women, and had fallen in love with a young

man for no earthly reason than because he was rather a fine-looking fellow, and they had been in juxtaposition! Oh Grace! Grace! beautiful, high-souled, vestal virgin, "thoroughgoing emancipationist where Women were concerned!" And now she had descended to this! She was crying her eyes out because she had been in juxtaposition with a young man, a very ordinary young man; and now he was going to be married to a girl named Lilith Turold, and she herself was left out in the cold.

"There is one consolation," said Grace, rising at last and drying her eyes; "no one will guess it. I have planned out my whole life, and already arranged to be a single woman. It was only a habit of mind I had got into; and it just proves that habits of mind and animal instincts are ignoble and ruinous. I wonder what this blue paper in my hand is, and how I came by it?" ended Grace, wrenching her thoughts violently from the hateful subject.

She had twisted the paper and torn it and crumpled it as she cried, like the silly woman she was; and now it was much defaced and hardly legible—a bit of untidy blue paper with cabalistic figures, chemical abbreviations and hieroglyphics. What was it?

She nearly threw it into the fire; then remembered that while talking to Tom, before the thunderbolt had fallen, a letter from Mr. Vane had come, which she had only half read. Grace, Mr. Vane's scientific pupil, held with her master a literary, scientific correspondence which occasionally blossomed into abstractions and moral philosophy. She was proud of it; it was not every young woman who wrote in that vein to a clever young man. In her secret soul she had dreams that her biography might come to be written and that that correspondence would be published. She wrote her letters carefully, making rough copies, two or three sometimes; and Edward Vane had told her sincerely enough that they were clever and

interesting letters. She looked forward eagerly for the philosopher's replies, read them over often, and involuntarily learned by heart any expressions of praise which they contained. To-day Edward's letter had seemed a little dull; her attention was to-day so very much more with Tom, who after all was far more real to her than was the clever young man who wrote about science. But in that letter Edward had sent her some notes on white paper of a recent experiment which he was going to describe in a magazine article; the crumpled blue paper, untidy though it was, must, Grace supposed, belong to these enclosures.

After a day or two she returned the white paper to Edward, and sent the blue one too without remark and without thinking much about it. The blue paper puzzled Edward in his turn. What was it? Whose was it? What was on it?

But he generally arrived at the truth about everything in some way or other; and before

very long he knew that Grace had sent it to him by mistake; that she had accidentally acquired it in Mr. Palmer's house, and that it furnished suggestions for the preparation of a new lamp-oil. Out of curiosity, Edward, the chemist, set himself to make that new oil according to the directions.

After nearly blowing himself up several times, he came to a few conclusions on the matter: namely, that the new oil was likely enough to come to something some day, as it gave an extraordinarily brilliant light, but that at present it was too dangerous for use; and that old Palmer was a very clever man to have invented it and a very stupid one to have let his rival's daughter get hold of his blue paper. And Edward further resolved not to let any one know that the blue paper had come into his hands and that he had followed the directions on it, and had seen the new oil.

CHAPTER VII.

MEANTIME Lilith had once more been clasped in her lover's arms.

"My own—my own!" said Tom, "my very own and for ever!"

"Oh, Tom, what did he say?" cried the girl; "has he said *Yes?*"

"A grudging sort of *yes*, but he has said it. Never mind, my sweet, we'll get rid of the grudge before the six months are over. Must we really wait six months, Lilith? It seems an eternity, but I suppose it isn't really. Ought we to fight him about that?"

"No, Tom, please don't. But will you love me as much at the end of six months as you do now?"

"At the end of six years."

"I suppose we must wait, Tom. But will he mind if we—well, see each other every day and—all that?"

"What does all that mean?" asked Tom, his lips on her black locks.

Lilith touched his neck lightly with her lips.

"It means—that kind of thing, perhaps."

"Do that again, Lilith."

"But what would papa say? Does he mean it?"

"I suppose he does. But to spare his feelings, Lilith, perhaps in public——"

Lilith screamed and jumped up.

"Tom, if *ever* you try to kiss me when *any one* is looking, or without my very distinct leave——"

"Have I leave now?"

"Well, yes—just now," said Lilith, condescendingly, settling down again.

"Tom, it was very good of you, I suppose, but you needn't have told papa every little

tiny thing. You needn't have told him I kissed you at Luxor."

"But I never did tell him, Lilith."

"Oh. I wish I had known you could be that much deceitful, then *I* wouldn't have told. I felt at the time it was a mistake, and I see now it was that which caused all the trouble. Papa is a curious man. It seemed to make him dislike you—the idea that I had kissed you at Luxor."

"How am I to get into his good books, Lilith?"

"Let me think. I'm afraid you'll have to grovel, Tom. Not so much to him; I don't know that he thinks so much of himself; but to me. It's very silly, of course, but papa always thinks of me as a princess. If you could pretend to think the same, just to please him——"

Then Mr. Turold was heard approaching. He was stopped by Yates, who was much mystified by the morning's proceedings, and not a little anxious. Mr. Thomas Palmer

had called and asked for Miss Turold. She had admitted him, and — in fact — well— Mr. Thomas Palmer was with Miss Turold still.

"Oh, indeed!" said the master, feeling in this encounter with his servant the depth of his humiliation. He hid himself in the library, and sat gazing into space, gnawing his fingers and beating the devil's tattoo with his foot. Presently came Lilith, put her arm coaxingly round his neck and kissed the top of his head.

"Papa dear, he's here."

No response.

"And he won't go away——"

"No nonsense, Lilith, if you please."

"—till he has spoken to you, papa."

"I don't wish to speak to him. I wash my hands of it."

"Oh, papa, you hurt me when you say that kind of thing!"

"He knows my views. I have nothing more to say to him."

"He wants to shake hands with you, papa."

"I haven't the smallest wish to shake hands with him. I am not going to do it."

"May I ask him to luncheon?"

"I wash my hands of it."

"But you will come to luncheon as usual? Papa, please do; you needn't speak or anything, but you might cut him some cold beef I do think," said Lilith, trying to laugh.

The gong sounded, and the dejected gentleman rose and moved towards the dining-room.

She flew for her lover.

"I don't think you had better *say* anything, Tom," she counselled, "not one word; but you are to come."

Yates and the young footman were in the room with their eyes wide open. Mr. Turold stood at his place, not looking up.

"Come now, my dear," he said, "make haste."

Tom walked straight to his host.

"How do you do, Mr. Turold?" he said.

Yates and the footman were watching, their eyes still wider.

"Oh, how do you do?" said Mr. Turold and gave a cold limp hand mechanically.

Tom subsided into a chair, and talked to the Princess Royal.

"Have you been out this morning, Lilith?" he asked.

"Oh, *do* take care!" murmured the girl.

Tom smiled at her fondly and repeated his question, laying a little stress on her name.

Mr. Turold's food choked him. He seemed to hear Yates's report in the servants' hall: "Palmer calls 'er Lilith."

"I am sorry," thought the poor gentleman, "that I spoke of a delay. I should rather he married her to-morrow, and took himself and her at once away out of my sight."

PART V.

THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE.

CHAPTER I.

BUT the course of true love never did run smooth; and though the engagement was a *fait accompli*, and the lovers were idyllically happy when alone together, various little annoyances inevitably arose connected with other people. Mr. Turold was deliberately obstructive, Edward wilily so; the old grandfather had turned against his own *protégé* and allowed him but one interview, in which he contradicted everything Tom said, and made rude remarks about Mr. Palmer. Tom coloured up and answered

back; and Lilith was terrified and got him out of the room.

"Tom dearest, you don't seem to understand. You don't show quite enough *finesse*," she said, standing before him and slowly swinging his arms backwards and forwards while she looked up in his face.

"And you, Lilith, are a darling, but you aren't quite simple enough."

"Simple, indeed!" said Lilith, with a little pout.

"Straightforward, I mean," said Tom, smiling at her. And she flushed slightly and felt reproved.

Each tried to amend, but the characteristics remained. Lilith admired his straightforwardness, and he loved her for her timidity; nevertheless, as time wore on it is a question if they did not occasionally a little "put each other out."

Lilith was much too shy to write to all her acquaintances and announce her engagement; and, of course, her father did not

offer to do it for her. She wore a diamond ring beside the little hoop of pearls, and Tom Palmer came and went, and they walked about the park together very happily. Of course all the servants knew, and the gossip below stairs was loud and hot. But such was the awe of the Turold name, and such the sense of surprise and disapproval, that the chatter scarcely went beyond the walls of Turold Royal, and Lilith's own circle did not get hold of it. Consequently, she started every time Tom's name was mentioned, could not speak to him with the smallest ease if there was a spectator, and had all the while an uncomfortable feeling that he was being horribly slighted. The only person she told, and that not of her free will, was her cousin Edward.

"You owe him an apology, my dear," said her father; "it is only fair to tell him you have given him up."

"Oh, papa," cried Lilith, "what *do* you

mean? I had nothing to do with Edward! I never gave him any encouragement!"

"Don't be so anxious to exculpate yourself, my love," said Mr. Turold. "*I* had encouraged him, as you perfectly know."

Hot tears of indignation fell from Lilith's eyes; but she wrote the letter, a slightly belligerent one. Edward sent her the cunningest and kindest of replies; so kind that on reading it she felt stings of remorse for her own expressions. And he earned her sincere gratitude by getting her out of Coventry, to which exasperating locality her father had exiled her during the early days of his annoyance.

Edward had not at all made up his mind how his rival was to be got rid of. The nice thing would be if Lilith were simply to tire of her bourgeois and dismiss him herself. But Edward's was not the sanguine temperament; he never expected fortune to favour him; whatever prize he obtained in this world, it would be after himself labouring for it with might and main.

For the present he waited, and was kind to the culprit.

One day Lilith went to her father with alarm in her heart and resolution painted on her countenance.

"Papa dear," she said, "I want to talk to you about our dinner-party next Thursday: would two more people matter much? I want to ask Mary Haslop, who is staying at the Vicarage."

"By all means, Lilith. I am very fond of Mary. And her brother?"

"No. Freddy Haslop is not there." A pause. "I want to ask Tom, papa."

A stony silence.

"Papa, don't you think people—our friends—would be rather astonished if they heard suddenly that Tom and I were engaged?"

"Very much astonished, indeed."

"Wouldn't it be better to let it be seen we know him? to—to—have him at our house? He might talk to me a little, when people

were looking, just to prepare their minds. Oh, papa, *don't* you think so?"

"I wash my hands of it, Lilith."

"Please, papa, don't say that! You make me so unhappy. If you would only try to be friends with Tom! It does seem to me so rude to him, and to me too, papa," said the Princess, "never to ask him to anything."

Mr. Turold coldly consented.

"Edward will be present also," he said. "I should like you to compare the two men, Lilith: your father's choice and your own. You may invite Mr. Palmer."

"Papa," said Lilith, making another effort, "don't you think I perhaps ought to announce my engagement?"

"As you please, my dear. I have no doubt Mr. Palmer is announcing it on al sides; every day I expect to see it advertized in the *Times*."

"That is not at all Tom's way, to boast!" cried Lilith; "every word you say, papa, just

proves what I tell you, that you don't know him a bit!"

Tom accepted Lilith's invitation, which was all right and just what she wished; but then he made a little mistake. There was to be a dinner party at Silcote Dene on Wednesday, and in accepting Miss Turold's invitation for himself, her lover enclosed one for her.

Lilith was horribly embarrassed. She did not at all want to dine at Silcote Dene. She did not feel on easy terms with Mrs. Palmer, nor did she fancy first exhibiting her intimacy with Tom anywhere but in her own home. Moreover, on the occasion of her one visit to the parents of her betrothed, she had accidentally caught a glimpse of Mr. Palmer in the garb he wore in his beloved laboratory; and now, twirling the invitation round and round, Lilith could not help remembering with dismay the dirty leather apron, the rolled-up sleeves and coarse arms, the unshaven face, and the strong smell of chemicals,

all suggesting the mere common workman. How very awkward she would feel dining with a man like that! And yet she knew the feeling was silly; for was he not her Tom's father, and consequently not to be avoided and ignored? Oh! why, why, why had Fortune arranged for Tom a father like that? And how *could* she go and dine with him? It always came back to that. How could she go and dine with a man who wore a leather apron, rolled up sleeves, etc.?

Nevertheless, she decided she must go; for she was very much in love with Tom and quite unequal to the task of disappointing him. If she declined, Tom might think she despised him and his belongings.

"I don't! I don't!" cried Lilith, her cheeks aflame with the recollections of having once told him "*You are not one of us.*"

Tom was in London, and she was not likely to see him till the occasion came. That made it all the worse. With a little

conversation, a kiss or two, she might gracefully have got out of it; pen and ink made nothing possible but Yea or Nay. She wrote her Yea, and sent it. Had she not said a hundred times that she would do anything for Tom?

But her own disinclination to the feast made her exaggerate the horror with which her father would regard it; and she prepared a fresh difficulty for herself by not telling him at once of Mr. Palmer's invitation, much less of her own acceptance of it. When Wednesday came she got a suitable dress ready, but still had not told her maid or any one that she was going out; she even gave a few hints about a headache, which, however, refused to come into existence to help her.

She sat in her own boudoir, practising her harp diligently. Music of any sort reminded her of Tom, and she felt rather inclined to cry, so melancholy and sentimental was her mood. And then suddenly she heard a

voice humming the air she was playing, and Tom himself was by her side.

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you!" exclaimed Lilith, jumping into his arms; and she never remembered the headache, which, of course, should have been mentioned at once.

"How dare you come up here?" cried Lilith, all sparkles; "this is my very own room. I never invited you up here! The servants will be guessing if we go on so, Tom! Look, that is my book-case with all my pet books. Some I have had since I was quite a little girl—'Effie's Friends,' and the 'King's Messengers,' and 'The Heir of Redcliffe.' And here is 'Friends in Council,' the first dull book I ever read to please myself. I often read dull books now. I do indeed, Tom. I will get anything you wish me to read, and study it, every single word, to please you."

"'*Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife!*'" said Tom, pinching her ears. "I think we all read too much. We know so well what's

been written about every single thing, that nobody ever gets at any thoughts of his own."

"Dear me!" cried Lilith; "then all the nice things you say to me, Tom, are they really quoted from books? I should never have found it out! And what a good memory you must have!"

"Sweet flatterer," said Tom, "tell me some books you want and I will send them to you."

"I should like a great many volumes of Ruskin," said Lilith, promptly.

"Ruskin!" echoed the barbarian; "what do you want Ruskin for?"

"I believe every word he says!" cried the girl, with dancing eyes.

"Do you? Well, I don't. I've always found a great gulf fixed between Mr. Ruskin's remarks and the truth—a gulf to drown in."

"A gulf, Tom? what nonsense! It's only a gap, which any one the least active-minded can scramble through somehow. And, Tom

dear, they have the most lovely bindings, and I never could afford to buy a single volume!"

"You shall have them all, Lilith," said Tom, laughing.

Then he told her that he had met Mr. Turold at the station: Mr. Turold just stepping into a train and sending a note to his daughter by the groom.

"He gave it to me instead," said Tom; "here it is."

"Papa gave *you* a message to bring to *me?*" cried Lilith. "Tom, he must be getting used to you! Give it to me. Why, I declare, papa has gone off to Market Harborough—telegraphed for by Erpingham. He won't be home till to-morrow. How very extraordinary of him! Dear me! I do hope he won't forget our dinner party!" Then she drew a grave face. "Do you know, Tom, I think we'll go down to the drawing-room. My best friends come up here, but Yates might think it funny for me

to give you tea up here the day papa is out."

"As you please, my treasure. But I think I'll go away now, or we shall have nothing left to say to each other to-night."

"Oh, to-night——" said Lilith, her embarrassment suddenly rolling over her spirit again, like a returning tide.

She led the way absently to the drawing-room, and rang for the tea. She poured it out, still silent and grave, and Tom began to wonder what she was thinking about.

"Tom dear," said Lilith at last, "I was considering if you would mind very much—I have rather a headache, you know—if I didn't come to-night."

"Didn't come, Lilith!" echoed Tom in dismay.

"Of course I *want* to come," said the girl hastily; "it isn't that, but——"

"You said you would come, Lilith! Why have you changed your mind? You haven't

really a headache, have you?" said Tom, suspiciously.

"No," said Lilith, colouring and laughing.

"You needn't tell me stories about it," said Tom. "Why don't you want to come?"

"I do want to come. I mean—it's only about papa; but of course as he's out I can manage it now quite easily."

"Did Mr. Turold not wish you to come?"

"I hadn't asked him. I meant to tell him just before I started."

"Did you? Or did you mean to say that to me about the headache?"

"Oh, Tom, please don't *you* be cross with me! You don't know how difficult it all is! I told you I wasn't brave."

Tom was a little disturbed, though he took her hand affectionately.

"But, Lilith, you mustn't ever be a coward with *me*. Why didn't you just tell me you would rather not?"

Lilith scented disapprobation, and was so

much agitated that her voice began to sound a little angry.

"Because if you didn't guess without my telling—Tom, what's the good of talking like this? Ring the bell, and I'll order the carriage. There is no real difficulty now."

Tom took his hand slowly away and was silent for a minute.

"But, Lilith, I don't see how you can come now, as you haven't asked him, and as you think he wouldn't like it."

"Of course he wouldn't like it. He doesn't *like* any of it. It's just that it's easier to do what he doesn't like, when he is not here to look vexed."

"Don't say that kind of thing, my darling. That is not the way to look at it."

"I will run up and tell grandpapa; that will do."

"No, that won't do," said Tom, rather shortly.

He was evidently displeased.

"You don't really care, Tom, do you?" said Lilith, growing alarmed.

"But of course I care, Lilith! My mother will be disappointed, and so will our friends who are expecting to see you. There will be wrong conjectures."

"You can tell Mrs. Palmer I have a headache. And the other people won't make any conjectures; none of them know about you and me."

"But, Lilith, they all know!" cried Tom, aghast.

"Oh no, Tom! You don't mean that you have told them? I haven't told any one; not a single person, except Edward, who is like one of ourselves!"

"Lilith——" He paused. "Lilith, I am very sorry if there has been a misunderstanding. I was never told this was to be kept secret."

"I didn't suppose you would need telling," said Lilith. "Papa said you would go spreading it, and I declared you would not!

I said it wasn't at all your way to boast——" She checked herself and glanced at her lover, alarmed by her own indiscreet speech.

Tom's heightened colour and flashing eyes were not reassuring; and Lilith was silent, drawing patterns on the rug with her toe and struggling with tears. There was a silence.

"Oh, Tom, don't, don't be angry with me!" cried Lilith at last, springing to her feet. "It is cruel, Tom, when I love you so, and everything is so difficult. I get frightened, and then you know I say silly things. Oh, do come and kiss me, Tom, and say you love me, and will forgive me everything!"

Of course they made it up, and were talking nonsense to each other as usual before ten minutes were out. Nevertheless, had Edward listened at the door, those few minutes would have fanned his hopes of an intervening providence.

Next day her cousin himself was with her, fraternal and friendly, taking Lilith's part,

eulogistic of Tom, while giving her to understand that his own heart was broken. Lilith was not going to believe that; but she had the woman's tenderness for a rejected suitor, and had never liked Edward better than at this moment.

Mr. Turold was surprised by the friendliness of the cousins as they sat chatting together before the dressing-bell rang. Always ready on the smallest provocation to resume his own discarded theories, he now decided afresh that the silly child's heart at bottom was really and truly her cousin's; and that her present engagement was all a piece of nonsense, doomed to the speediest decay.

The piece of nonsense meanwhile was fertile in irritations.

An hour later Lilith was ready dressed, and with her father and her cousin was awaiting the arrival of the dinner-party guests. Her frock was very simple and girlish; but she wore one of Tom's orchid blossoms, and round her throat a diamond

necklace which he had given her. Very conscious of it, and in some trepidation, she entered the drawing-room. Mr. Turold looked her up and down without any smile of approval. His eye rested on the brilliants, and, after an uncomfortable pause, he said gently, for he was really sorry to snub her at this moment:

"My love, you are too young to wear diamonds in that profusion, and they do not suit your dress. Run and take them off."

Edward saw an opportunity.

"Oh, Lilith!" he exclaimed, "why have you had them reset? This modern setting is not to be named in a breath with the old one."

Lilith coloured.

"What on earth do you mean, Edward? Reset? But this is a new necklace."

"Oh, I beg pardon!" said Edward, quickly; "to be sure, I see now that it's new. But I never imagined any jewels on you except the family ones."

"Lilith has never worn our diamonds," interrupted Mr. Turold, "and they would be ridiculous at a quiet party like this. Oblige me, my dear," he ended persuasively, in a low voice.

Edward now produced a plain gold necklet of delicate workmanship.

"I was just going to offer you this, Lilith," he said. "Do you not think, Gilbert, she might do me the honour——"

"Certainly, certainly," said her father. "It is beautiful, Edward. My love, you will please your cousin by wearing it to-night."

"No, Edward," said Lilith, appealingly; "indeed I can't put it on now. This is Tom's present, and I am going to wear it."

Here was rebellion.

"My dear," said Mr. Turold, "do you want it advertized that we have sold you to a rich man for diamonds? Even family jewels are out of place on a young girl. New ones smelling of a shop counter are

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always to my mind in bad taste. You must remove them, Lilith; and quickly too," he added, for wheels had already been heard, and now came footsteps.

Lilith had no time for reflection; direct disobedience was a tremendous step; and besides, jewels which were not heirlooms seemed to herself little less alarming than false ones. Mechanically she unfastened her necklace, and just as the door was opening, Mr. Turold snatched it up and put it in his pocket to get it out of the way; and while Sir Maxwell and Lady Majoribanks were being announced, Edward snapped his little gold circlet round Lilith's throat, which felt it burn like an inquisition torture. All this was discomposing to the young hostess.

Lilith had smiled to herself in the morning, thinking what fun it would be treating her lover as a mere acquaintance, touching his hand stiffly and calling him Mr. Palmer. But the fun was taken out of her now, and

her attitude to her betrothed seemed like treason. Tom's one glance at her neck showed her that he missed his diamonds; and she thought he guessed the little circle of delicate gold to have been the gift of another. At her earliest opportunity, and in Tom's hearing, she said to her cousin, "Edward, it's too tight, I can't wear it;" and took the hateful thing off and left it on the table, thus annoying her father, and calling more than one person's attention to the fact that it had been Edward's gift.

Tom was, of course, perfectly well received. Seated between the friendly Mrs. Trevylyan and a lively young lady who admired his appearance, he got on excellently well; and Mr. Turold breathed more freely, allowing himself once or twice to address his prospective son-in-law. Edward alone, though apparently cordial to the alien, steered the conversation into channels which might, he hoped, bring him to shipwreck.

"Let us rejoin the ladies," said Gilbert Turold, gloomily, not quite fancying the topics thus started, and imagining them to be of Tom's introducing.

"I should think that young fellow was a good man of business," was the remark of one of the guests, buttonholing his host; "he explained the situation admirably. I confess I was getting into a panic about my banker's liabilities, and it's pleasant to be enlightened in a monetary crisis by a city man. Certainly I was a little surprised to meet young Palmer here, but what a presentable chap he is! It shows what a public school can do. Not that his father isn't a most worthy man too, in his own way."

Mr. Turold, as may be imagined, listened to all this with very mixed feelings.

In the drawing-room Miss Haslop was singing; but Lilith had opened the piano for a different musician. Presently she had Tom at the piano, preluding vaguely with the recognized master touch which checked

conversation, and asking Miss Turold what he was to sing.

Lilith did not make a very sympathetic selection, but he got interested in the difficult passages of the opera song she had demanded, and his fine voice rang out splendidly. The room was rapt, and the old ladies put up their eye-glasses and looked at the singer in amazement.

"Really, my dear Miss Turold," said Lady Majoribanks, "I have never heard such a voice out of a concert-room."

"Yes! Doesn't he sing well!" cried Lilith, delighted.

"Far too well for an amateur," contributed Edward's clear, smiling tones.

Lady Majoribanks was intolerably stupid, and had been out of the county for eighteen months; she had been wondering the whole evening who the strange young man could be.

"Ah, Mr. Vane explains it," she said in a croaky whisper. "I saw he was no amateur. He has the professional genius. Very fine

indeed! very delightful! We heard you were taking lessons, dear Miss Turold. This gentleman is, of course, your music-master. I hope you will introduce him to me, and perhaps he will sing at our hospital concert."

Lilith was aghast; and her father's annoyance was ill-concealed, and Edward was smiling. So indeed was Tom, who, to say truth, was rather flattered. But neither Lady Majoribanks nor Lilith regarded music-masters as quite "one of themselves," and the girl would have liked to knock the blundering old lady down. Her resolution was taken in a moment; there were occasions on which she could be brave enough.

"*Tom*, you must sing again; not that sort of song. I don't know why I asked for it. Sing Schumann's 'Lorelei,' please, *Tom*." And she stood up in the centre of the room, looking like a trembling doe at bay.

Tom saw he was intended to support her.

"If I can remember it, *Lilith*," he said with a smile, and began the delicate swaying symphony; while Mr. Turold and Edward exchanged glances, and all the strangers held their breath.

"Is that young man a relation of yours, Mr. Turold?" asked old Sir Maxwell, who was nearly as stupid as his wife. "I observed a likeness——"

"A likeness! What will people say next?" thought Gilbert Turold; but *esprit de corps* brought him to Lilith's assistance. "You had better ask my daughter, Sir Maxwell," he said dryly. "You see she addresses him as a relation."

Lilith sank down again on her chair, and stared at the carpet, and said the multiplication table to herself, hoping to regain composure after this violent effort. When Tom was singing the concluding passage:

> "Kommst nimmer mehr aus diesem wald,
> Nimmer mehr—nimmer mehr"—

a slight commotion arose, and a cry that Miss

Turold was fainting. He stopped abruptly, pushed Edward aside, and himself, unforbidden, raised the drooping girl. The secret was well out, even before she had opened her eyes with quick return of life and had smiled at him.

When everybody had gone that night, the still agitated Lilith was with her father, who until a month ago had admired everything she did, and praised her to herself and to every one a hundred times more than ever she deserved.

"I am not pleased, Lilith," he was saying; "you are so sudden in your moods and so changeable in your conduct that you become melodramatic. Well, you may go to bed with the pleasant conviction that to-morrow you'll be the best-discussed young woman in the county."

"Papa," pleaded Lilith, "I *couldn't* listen to people making remarks about him and not speak out. How could I?"

"As you have chosen to engage yourself

to a man people 'make remarks about,' I can quite understand that you occasionally find you are in an awkward position. It must have been mortifying to the young man himself to see you so ashamed as to faint, when your connection with him was perceived."

"Will Tom think *that!*" cried the poor child in dismay. "Oh, papa, why did you take his necklace? It all came of that. It made me wretched, and Tom will think I did not care for his present. Papa, give it me back."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Mr. Turold, more moved than he cared to express, and tossed her the diamonds carelessly, and kissed her with assumed indifference.

Nevertheless, though the manner of the betrothal's announcement had been offensively sensational, Mr. Turold got on better with Tom after this. It was not in Gilbert Turold to be uncivil except under immediate provocation; he became used to seeing the

lovers together; he found the young man rather a pleasant companion than otherwise, and if the engagement was a nine-days' wonder, no one wondered very loud in his hearing, and the nine days passed with surprising celerity.

"Let us be most careful"—this had been Edward's advice—"not to alienate Lilith. If she wearies of this man, let her have a father, and may I not say a brother?—to turn to for affection and sympathy."

Mr. Turold thought these the words of wisdom, and believed himself to have them in mind, as he gradually resumed his caressing tone towards his disobedient daughter.

CHAPTER II.

AS for Edward himself, he played his part so well that Lilith thought him quite marvellously improved. As a semi-lover he had not shone, but even in the days of the semi-lovering he had been an intimate friend. Now she had no reserve at all in her feeling about him; he was a kind and convenient champion and ally, a confidant, in fact, as he said himself, an elder brother.

But, then, Lilith knew nothing at all—and Tom hardly enough to justify his enduring dislike—of the cynical speeches Edward made about the engagement behind Lilith's back. People said he talked nonsense; nevertheless, he made an impression, and

his words got repeated about, and more seriously than he had uttered them.

The Turolds were admittedly out at elbows; they were selling their heiress for cash. The correct thing to do, wasn't it? A nobody? A low-born chap? Oh, the Turolds tried to live up to their times. It was no longer fashionable to be well-born. It was as unfashionable as to marry for love. Miss Turold marrying for love? No; she was marrying for diamonds. Hadn't you seen her new necklace? Her father pleased? Yes, in a way. He had had one great fright, poor man; he had thought his heiress was going to marry her first love, who wasn't modern at all, and who never could have bought her that necklace. And, really now, she simulated a liking for her betrothed very prettily. The only pity was the six months' delay. So many things can happen in six months. Riches sometimes fly away in six months; first loves sometimes rise from the dead; lovers' quarrels cannot always be deferred.

"I don't care what any one says!" cried Geraldine Mount-Jocelyn. "I believe Lilith *is* in love with him, and I think it a delightful marriage. And does that horrid little Mr. Vane mean himself by the first love? What nonsense it is! As if Lilith couldn't have married him if she had wished!"

"I believe Lilith will marry Mr. Vane," said her mother, whose views were naturally less romantic than her daughter's.

And there were other people who said the very same thing, and believed they grounded their assertion on the law of probability and on sundry other immutable natural laws as well.

Still the months wore on, and spring came, and Lilith was buying her modest trousseau, and longing for the termination of the half-year's probation. By this time her lover knew all the pictures at Turold Royal, and had heard the stories of all the dead men and women whose features looked

out at him like ghosts from their canvas. Lilith had learned those legends in her cradle, and to her they were reverend as the tales in Samuel or the Chronicles; she wanted her husband to revere them all too, and was perhaps a little too serious about them.

"Doesn't it interest you, dearest?" she said one day, stopping abruptly when Tom had been betrayed into a yawn.

"Oh yes," he replied, apologetically; "only not quite so much as ourselves, I think."

"But they *are* ourselves!" cried Lilith. "You will feel it, Tom, I know you will!"

"I'd give a great deal that you weren't the heiress, my pet!" said Tom, impulsively.

"But that is treason, Tom! Why *do* you say so?" cried Lilith, as much astonished as if he had wished her humpbacked.

"Because—all this glory will be thrown away upon me," said Tom Palmer, jocular yet serious. "I shan't know what to do with it. I think my slender Lilith much

sweeter than those voluminous women, her ancestresses, and I won't have her conform to their pattern. And I doubt I shall ever know the genealogy quite perfectly; and, as for Perkin Warbeck's head, and the Count of Edessa's dirty doublet, and Bluebeard's warming-pan, and King Log's caul, and all the rest of them, if they were mine, Lilith, not yours, my sweet—I appreciate the difference—but truly and actually *mine*, do you know what I'd be strongly tempted to do?"

"I don't want to know," said Lilith, playfully striking him with a paper-knife. "Of course you are only teasing me; but I don't like to be teased about the things I value most in the world. And all mine is yours, of course, Tom—only not to make game of. Don't you really care for them a little?" she ended, with her pretty smile.

"Oh yes, very much—especially because you do. Only not the cauls, Lilith; they are too physiological. And I'd like to bury

the heads; even Perkin Warbeck, I suppose, had his rights as a man. And, Lilith, you mustn't bother me about the Pretender because Edward Vane chooses to write the poor fool's biography. I was born with a contempt for the Pretender, and so I dare say was Edward himself. That cousin of yours plays with opinions which are other men's creeds, and he takes up as '*πάρεργα*' what to others are the serious businesses of entire lives. It's all cant and rubbish and conceit, and I won't have anything to do with it; and I don't intend to read Edward's article when it comes out. Do you hear?"

"You are just as wicked about Edward as he is about Prince Charlie," said Lilith; "and you *know* he has only taken the subject up to please papa. I wish you were more like Edward, Tom!" cried Lilith, standing in front of her lover, her hands behind her back and her eyes sparkling.

"It's all cant and rubbish and vanity!" repeated Tom, smiling at her; and he lifted

her off her feet and kissed her, and went away smiling still.

But once out of her presence he grew a little serious, and wondered in his heart whether Lilith really cared for all these matters as much as she thought she did; and the idea crossed his mind that his wife's family and the atmosphere of the Court might become a little oppressive, and that he might, in the days to come, find himself a fish out of water there, if not a bit of a charlatan.

"I do wish she wasn't the heiress," repeated Tom. "Still, she'd never have been quite what she is if she had grown up away from those red walls and that terraced garden. I could feel the old place's seduction well enough if I wasn't told quite so much about it."

And then he went off into self-questionings more practical and, in some ways, more harassing about the exact shaping of the life he and Lilith were to lead together, till

the day, at least, when she should be called to mount her little throne upon her father's death. Tom did not, in his mind's eye, see the shape of his married life quite so clearly as he wished; there had been things said to him, not indeed by his bride, but by her family, about fashionable London society and about the House of Commons, which had not altogether pleased him. The fashionable London society he could easily refuse, but the House of Commons was a more difficult problem, because not without its attractions. Yet Tom had a strong conviction that he was not yet ready for the House of Commons; he did not even know upon which side of that House he would wish to sit. He had been bred a Radical, but had now a growing suspicion that most modern Radicalism was ignorance; certainly that his dear old father's was—ignorance, and generous error. The Turolds, of course, took for granted that Lilith's husband would follow the Tories; but Tom felt quite as

little inclined for that as for the Radicalism, especially at the bidding of his relations-in-law. It was evident the House of Commons would have to wait for Lilith's Prince Consort; he was not going to be hustled into a position for which he felt himself unfit, because his relations-in-law represented it as a sort of pledge of respectability. Altogether, his back was a little up about his relations-in-law, and he wished heartily he could have had Lilith without them.

There were other questions too: what was to be Lilith's attitude to *her* relations-in-law? This was a point to which so far they had shut their eyes, and Tom really did not know what his bride's theories about it were. He had his own, however, and one day he made up his mind to express them. Lilith herself gave him an opportunity.

"Tom," she said, gently, "why have you never asked me to dinner again? I hardly know your mother, though we have been engaged all these months. I'm afraid you

were offended because I didn't go the first time."

Tom sat down beside her and kept silence for a minute.

"I have always been sorry, Lilith, that you didn't come that day, for I think we got a little into the wrong course in consequence. Once we are married, we must make a change. If I were going to marry a Spaniard," he went on, cautiously, "I should expect her, when the ceremony was over, to become an Englishwoman."

"But, Tom, not if you were going to live with her in Spain," said Lilith.

"I shouldn't dream of expatriating myself," he answered, quickly.

She laughed.

"I speak in parables, Lilith."

"I know, Tom dear. Please say what you mean, straight out."

"I want to look ahead a little. It would pain me very much, my sweet, if my father should think—what wouldn't be true, I know,

only he might fancy it—that my wife looked down upon him. Once we are married, you must come and stay in his house and get to know him; and my mother too, and my friends. I don't suppose you'll find them exactly like the people you've been used to, but they have quite as good hearts." He dropped the hortatory tone, which, indeed, was little natural to him, and burst out with some vehemence, "Lilith! what I want to say is this: I know, intimately, a lot of people whom I don't believe you will like one bit; and yet I can't, and I won't, turn my back on them, and you mustn't ask it!"

"Indeed, Tom——" began Lilith.

"Let me finish! I ought to have put it all before you long ago. There's no use, Lilith, in pretending to ourselves or to one another, that it's going to be all plain sailing. It hasn't been plain sailing yet, and we're probably at the easiest part of it. I want you to understand that I can't and I won't turn my back on my old friends and companions

and relations because I have married above me; and I'll tell you another thing I can't do: I can't enrol myself in one class and my wife in another. If you don't feel with me there, Lilith, we shall never get on, for divergence of aim about that kind of thing would be a constant irritation, and I'm not at all sure I could stand it patiently!"

"But I will always try to do just what you like, Tom," said Lilith, caressing but rather bewildered, for Tom seemed agitated. It had been an effort to him to say all this, and the effort showed. "Oh, Tom! you aren't repenting, are you?" she faltered, turning suddenly pale.

"Silly goose!" said Tom, putting his arm round her. "Repent? *I?* When I love you, Lilith? But listen, my sweet; your grandfather sent for me this morning. He was talking of our arrangements, our means, our residence——"

"Yes! yes! Tell me, Tom."

"He seemed to suppose we should live

here, in this house. Now, Lilith, I may as well say decidedly, I have never contemplated that for a moment, and I shouldn't like it at all."

"Oh, Tom!" Lilith's face fell, and he kissed her tenderly; but his heart was beating with vague apprehension.

"I shouldn't like it at all," repeated Tom; "and, Lilith, I don't mean to do it."

There was a pause, and he saw her lip quivering.

"What is your idea, then, Tom?" faltered Lilith, so gently that he was touched to the core.

"Oh, my darling, have you been counting on that?" exclaimed Tom. "Wouldn't you rather have a house of your own—be alone with me?"

"Oh yes, Tom, I'd *like* to be alone with you, of course, only——"

"Go on, my treasure," said Tom, much troubled; "let's have it out. I had no idea you were counting on that, Lilith!"

"Tom," said the girl, with some eagerness, "you know I've been brought up to think it would be quite *wrong* for me ever to live anywhere else. That's why they didn't let me marry Lord Beacon—not that I wanted to—because he has ties and estates of his own. And *you* haven't, Tom. You could fix all your interests here, as if *you*, not I, were the heir. I thought you'd always be here with papa, just as he has been with grandpapa. But, of course, Tom, I will do whatever you like," she ended, with the gentle submissiveness and the quivering lip which had touched him before.

Tom shook his head gravely.

"My darling, I could never occupy to your father the position he has occupied to your grandfather. Neither he nor I could tolerate it. And, Lilith, are you not counting your chickens a little before they are hatched? Your father dropped a hint to that effect in the course of this conference to-day."

"What sort of hint, Tom?" said Lilith, indifferently.

"He spoke of his great regret that he had no male heir, and hinted that he might marry again."

Tom was astonished by the effect these words had upon Lilith. She sat up quite straight on the sofa, removing herself a little from him as if offended; and her cheek flushed and paled, and flushed and paled, with quick alternations.

"I think, Tom," she said, "you must have misunderstood papa. Certainly it is not like him to joke in that way."

"He was not joking. Why shouldn't he marry, Lilith? He is not at all old. Is he even fifty?"

"Papa will not marry again," said Lilith, "because he was very fond of my dear, dead mother. If you had known her, Tom, you would understand that. Suppose I were to die, would you go and marry somebody else not three years after?"

"That is entirely different!" said Tom; presently however, he added, returning to his original point, "Well, if Mr. Turold has any idea of the kind, he will hardly ask our advice. But, considering the possibility, Lilith, if for no other reason, I don't mean to fix my residence in his house. You must make up your mind to that, my dearest."

"I will do just whatever you like, Tom," said Lilith, but with more hauteur than when she had spoken the words a few minutes earlier.

"Shall we build a caravanserai on the banks of the Nile, where we saw each other first?" he said playfully, bending over her; "or have you ever dreamed my dream of an English cottage—with a double coach-house, of course—far down in the blue country, with climbing roses and wild nightingales, and no one but you and me to live in it?" And he chanted—

> "There, with a loaf of bread, beneath the bough,
> A flask of wine, a book of verse, and *thou*
> Beside me, singing in the wilderness——"

Lilith smiled and put her hand in his; but there was some unusual pathos in her smile, and he felt across his spirit a shadow of misgiving.

"I do wish you hadn't repeated that to me about papa!" she said, presently. "I am quite sure he was not speaking seriously; but, still, if he felt love to be at all what *we* think it—you and I, Tom—he could not have made even the suggestion. Don't you agree with me, dearest?"

"He wants a male heir," said Tom; "and at the risk of offending you, my princess, I must say, for my own part, I sincerely wish he had one."

"But not at the price of a crime against Love," said Lilith, very gravely, and rather hurt that Tom would not assent. She rose, and was leaving him. "As to a male heir," she said, fearful of having given a wrong impression, "I could welcome him cordially. Of course I could! That's another question altogether. All I mean is that to think papa

could forget my darling mother, is nearly as bad to me, Tom, as to think you could forget me!" And she retired with tears in her eyes, and feeling scarce less melancholy than Hamlet, when his mother married her brother-in-law, and he, in consequence, lost all his own faith in the innocent Ophelia.

Lilith was only nineteen, and she had lived much with her own uncorrected thoughts, and had breathed from her cradle an atmosphere of romance and of illusion, perhaps of sentiment. The danger of an illusion's sudden destruction is that some opposing illusion takes root and grows lustily in the vacant place. There was danger of some such evil growth in Lilith's fancy now that she had suddenly become aware of illusion in her idea of wedded love and constancy. Yet the little seed of doubt might never have had even a chance of growing had she not happened to read the *Queen* newspaper that night, when she was waiting for the dinner bell. In it she found the report of an

address to some Woman's Guild in Birmingham, spoken by that earnest, beautiful, impressive creature Miss Kidson, at an anniversary meeting. Her subject was the difference between Women and men, and this is what Lilith read :—

"Men, be it always remembered, are not like us ; they love Woman, but not one woman in particular. If they cannot have the woman they desire, they take another. It is not because Women have less character than men, so that one is as good as the other; it is because men have less character, little earnestness, no enthusiasm. They *can*not be true in love. Widows seldom marry ; widowers always ; old men take wives daily ; old women have more sense. Some day we shall see equal laws for men and Women, and public opinion will bear equally on both. At present, man is judged the more leniently ; he who being the stronger, should have more expected from him, not less. Why *should* he be fickle and faithless ? Can the question be answered ? And that he is fickle and faithless, the indisputable testimony of facts proves to us daily. The young curates, the mothers' darlings, propose to girl after girl, because they must catch wives of some sort. The admirable and excellent fathers of families are rewedded within twelve months from the day when their wives' coffins are carried from their doors. If the good men treat us thus, what shall we say of the others ?"

Here Lilith, greatly incensed, tore the paper to pieces, and felt sure that Grace Kidson was a wicked liar and a calumniator of the male sex in general, and, at any rate, of her dear lover, Tom Palmer; who was most certainly constant, and quite absolutely true, even if in this respect he were unlike every other man in the whole wide world.

CHAPTER III.

ONE more cause of anxiety had the expectant bridegroom at this time. He was uncomfortable about his father's affairs, and inclined to regret a half promise he had given to Mr. Turold that he would retire from the paraffin business. Mr. Palmer was nowadays giving his whole time to his experiments, and was more and more trusting his matters to Howe. And Tom had arrived at the conclusion that Jim Howe, Mr. Palmer's right-hand man, had become a very doubtful sort of character.

"Father," said Tom, "it's a wild goose you are looking for, or a mare's nest; but even if it's a golden egg, do, for heaven's

sake, give it up for the present and come back to the shop."

"I am on the brink of a discovery," said Mr. Palmer, placidly. "I won't put it aside now, even if we are temporarily losing a little."

"Oh, losing—that is not it. But I don't like this speculating way of business we are drifting into."

"It has been a speculating, advertising business all along. In my early days I had frights enough, I can tell you," said Mr. Palmer, cleaning his spectacles calmly.

"You have big liabilities."

"Of course I have."

"Do you know how big?"

"Of course I do. Jim does at least. He and I are one."

"That is it. Jim may be a capital chap, but it is your money he is chucking about, and your credit he is staking, not his."

"He has trebled our profits in the last

four years. Jim has a head on his shoulders, and no mistake! What do you know about it, Tom?"

"Precious little: Jim takes care of that. I want to be certain, dad, that you know more. I see you signing papers and accepting responsibilities, and I don't believe you know what they are about. You are thinking of hydro-carbons. I wish you'd order me to overhaul everything, father."

Mr. Palmer laughed and slapped his son on the back.

"Thank you, Tom; but to say the truth, I feel more confidence in Jim."

"Then I wish you'd take him into partnership. Free lances are dangerous to everybody," urged Tom.

Mr. Palmer sat down and reflected; but his mind wandered away from Jim Howe.

"The moment I have solved my problem," he said, "I am going to make an offer of partnership to Kidson: perhaps sooner, Tom. This Boisee monopoly which Jim is

securing for us will be very apt to shut Kidson up straight off; and he's my old friend, and I won't ruin him."

"Do whatever you like about Kidson," said Tom, "but, for heaven's sake, don't put your name to that monopoly job till you know all about it. I don't believe it's a square transaction!"

"I have perfect confidence in Jim," said Mr. Palmer, severely. "He knows my principles, and is as scrupulous as I am myself; more so, if anything. You are so inexperienced, my dear boy, that you don't know how things are managed; and you think, like other generous young fellows, that all business is trickery, guided by self-interest, and worked by lies. When you're a bit older you'll learn that though it looks all much alike to an outsider, there's a way of playing fair and a way of playing foul. It's a damned uncharitable thing to suppose a man is playing foul because you ain't clever enough yourself to understand his game;

and I won't have you say it of Jim, whom I know as well as I know you."

Tom was not satisfied; and indeed he had succeeded in a little frightening Mr. Palmer. The old man did tear himself away from his beloved problem, and for a while went to town regularly. But Howe, though he could never have compounded a new oil, was in some ways a very far cleverer man than his principal; and he had a plausible reply ready for every question he was asked. Mr. Palmer, though pleased by his son's zeal, thought he wanted discretion, and had neither business faculties nor discernment of character.

"It's a poor enough thing I made of it till I lighted on Jim," he said; "it's Jim has made my fortune for me, and it would be a queer reward if I took to distrusting him now. I suppose the partnership I had meant for you, Tom, must be his. He deserves it, and you, my dear lad, haven't the head for it, I see clearly, any more than I

have myself by rights. You may as well please your new family by withdrawing from the concern at once and turning your mind to something you are better suited for."

"My new family, as you call it," said Tom, "may whistle for me a little longer. I mean to hold on to the old one as long as I can. You will let me go to the West for you, father, as a parting job."

"My dear boy, I don't see the necessity for any one to go. Jim was on the spot for six months and went into it thoroughly. And the matter is all settled."

"No, the contract isn't signed. I've no doubt it's all right, as you and Jim say so; but I shan't be easy on my wedding-day, unless either I or you have had a personal interview with those two men in Boisee city, and I am certain we aren't cheating them."

"Cheating them? Good Lord! Certainly, Tom, I should like you satisfied on that point. But I had best go myself. It's a long journey, and to do any good when you

get there, you'd have to stay more than ten minutes. Even if you started to-morrow, I don't see how you could be back in time for your wedding."

"I must explain to Lilith," said Tom; "perhaps she'll come with me. No, dad, you shan't go. You don't think the expedition necessary; and you are in pursuit of your wild goose; and you know you'd never find the place. The thing is for my own satisfaction, and I'll go myself."

They settled it so. Mr. Palmer always liked to indulge his son's whims; besides, he had taken alarm, for Tom was so very much in earnest; and there was something, too, a little suspicious in Howe's manner when he heard of the scheme. Perhaps the thing did require looking into; perhaps for once in his life Jim had blundered. Mr. Palmer talked in an off-hand manner of the possibility of the speculation turning out badly and losing him a little money; but what had really stung him to action had

been Tom's half-laughing suggestion that not on himself but on the two men in Boisee city who were trusting him, might the losses fall.

But what view would be taken of Tom's journey at Turold Royal? One morning the young man presented himself before his future father-in-law in order to find out.

Gilbert Turold was in no very good humour with Mr. Tom Palmer; for Edward, who had cultivated an acquaintance of late with Sir Joseph Kidson and Mr. Howe, and various other persons of the same order, had been entertaining his kinsman with some alarming reports and unpleasing information which he had picked up about old Palmer's speculations and affairs.

"I wouldn't believe all that fellow Kidson says," said Mr. Turold, rather irritated; "he's a noisy, pushing incendiary. Lilith says he has a handsome daughter. Where the deuce do these people get their looks from? I dare say, now, your mother thinks

Miss Kidson as dangerous a person as I consider old Palmer's handsome son."

They both laughed.

"I confess," said Edward, "I think Tom Palmer admires the handsome Miss Kidson too much. Why, he's as much with her as with Lilith!"

"Really, Edward——" began Mr. Turold, irritated again.

And at this moment Tom came in, and explained about his proposed journey less easily than he had intended. It sounded a formidable sort of job and a work of supererogation, even to himself; and he could see his two hearers pricking up their ears.

"But," said Mr. Turold, impatiently, "I thought it was understood, Tom, that you were not to be mixed up in these affairs?"

"After my marriage, sir."

"You might retire a little sooner, I should think. What does my daughter say to your going off in this way?"

"I was going to ask if you would modify the agreement a little, and let our marriage take place at once."

"What! to leave your wife at the church door?"

"I hope to persuade Lilith to come to America with me."

"To go *with* you?" echoed Mr. Turold in amazement.

"If," interposed Edward, "there is some miscarriage in Mr. Palmer's affairs, the question of settlements——"

"Oh, I didn't mean to imply any serious miscarriage," said Tom.

"But I understand, Gilbert," continued Edward, suavely, "that your consent to the marriage at all depends on securing a rather more favourable settlement——"

"Yes, yes, yes; Tom knows all about that. But the marriage mustn't be hurried, Tom. You must wait the full six months."

"I am afraid my father's affairs can't be put off, sir. I ought to start next week,

properly. If our wedding can't be within a fortnight, it may have to wait till August."

"Certainly an awkward proposition for the lover to make to his betrothed," said Edward; "it looks as if he were beginning to have doubts. Is this journey an excuse for deferring your marriage, Mr. Palmer?"

Tom was too angry to reply.

"What do you say, sir?" he asked Mr. Turold.

"Oh, the longer it is put off the better pleased I shall be. I wish to heaven, Tom, you *were* beginning to have doubts."

"I have none."

"Lilith has doubts," said Edward; "you remember, Gilbert, what she said to me yesterday?"

Mr. Turold did not remember, but he nodded.

"You misunderstand everything," said Tom, hotly, to Edward. "Neither Lilith nor I have any doubts."

"Still, I can't have the marriage hurried," said Mr. Turold.

"And of course," added Edward, "the contingency as to the settlements——"

"Oh, there's no difficulty about the settlements," said Tom, angrily, and made his escape.

As the door rather loudly closed behind him, Edward turned to his kinsman and said—

"I believe that man has a thorough bad temper."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Turold; "I only wish he had some tangible fault."

"I wonder now," continued Edward, thoughtfully, "is he as frank as he seems? Certainly to-day he gave me an impression of keeping something back; and that touch of temper showed nervousness—anxiety."

"What the devil are you hinting at, Edward?"

"Knowing those facts I mentioned to you, and from what Tom himself admits,

I am convinced there is something seriously wrong with the money affairs. His going off in this manner can be explained in two ways only: either he is getting tired of Lilith, or there is some miscarriage more serious than they confess."

"You exaggerate, Edward. I see nothing extraordinary. The fellow wishes to help his father in a difficulty."

"A difficulty? exactly. Delay is advisable, Gilbert, depend upon it."

"Oh, to be sure! You prophesied, Edward, that this detestable marriage would have fallen to pieces on its own account before this."

"I believe it *is* falling to pieces," said Edward, calmly; "all we need is delay."

CHAPTER IV.

EDWARD VANE had by this time given up his college rooms and removed all his scientific and professorial instruments to his house at Molesworthy, where a newly added turret contained every convenience for his recreations. Never before had he had a haunt thoroughly to his taste—shut off from his bustling relatives, from inquisitive and intrusive servants, and also from provokingly sympathetic college acquaintances. A deaf and dumb lad, who stoked his furnaces and cleaned his vessels, was his only familiar; for Edward, while disdaining the playthings of other men, was half-ashamed of his own occupations, and only in seclusion could carry them on to his mind.

"I am a man out of date," he said to himself. "Four hundred years ago I should certainly have found the philosopher's stone. But this nineteenth century ruins my faith, and works without faith are dead. No one of my temperament ever made a discovery; and unless a man can invent something new, he has no excuse for dabbling in art, or experimenting in science. Even the little job I have on hand now is no honour to me. It will probably come to nothing, and if it does, I have ploughed with another man's heifer, and must in honour refuse the harvest."

As he soliloquized he was alone with the doors locked in his turret-room; which, though more orderly than Mr. Palmer's laboratory at Silcote Dene, was at this time pervaded by the same acrid and detestable scent, and had a good many of the same materials ready to hand for identical operations. Here Edward habitually spent his evenings, and always in the place of honour before him lay the crumpled and scribbled bit

of blue paper which Grace had accidentally sent among his notes for the magazine article.

At last, one night he trimmed a new lamp and filled its reservoir with a colourless, mild-looking fluid of his own compounding; and, with a smile of triumphant excitement on his lips, he applied a match to the wick. In a moment the room was pervaded by the softest, yet the most brilliant, the steadiest *sunshine:* a light as of a cloudless June afternoon, yet with that tender tinge of artificial colour always so desirable in a ball-room. Edward himself was taken aback by the beauty of the flame he had produced. He watched his lamp for a long time, his heart beating with surprise and agitation as he reflected on all this new oil might signify to himself and also to others. Then he laughed a little, and played with the blue paper, adding a few hieroglyphics to its scribbles, then tossing it carelessly into the fire and extinguishing his lamp.

"The man who hit upon it must have genius," he said, "or else on Fortune's cap, he's the very button. Yet, as he wrote it down, it's of no use except for producing explosions. Well, if he has genius (which I haven't), he will very quickly think of the little addition I have made to his receipt, and he will himself light up this gorgeous lamp. Upon my soul, it is superb. And now what am I to do with it? Shall I give it to Grace, who sent me the heifer to plough with? Two years ago I believe I should have handed it at once to Palmer. Poor old chap; I should like to do it now. He deserves it, I must admit."

Edward stood for a minute irresolute, his hand on his brow, his mind rapidly reviewing his present position, his past history, his projects for the future. It was not the moment in which he could afford generosity or even common justice to any one belonging to Tom Palmer; so he shrugged his shoulders, sat down to his desk, and wrote to Sir Joseph Kidson.

Next evening, in obedience to Mr. Vane's request, the worthy knight presented himself at Molesworthy House, feeling, indeed, a good deal pleased by the invitation, for though he had sniffed in Luxor at the little thoroughbred Edward Vane, he fell under his influence here at home.

Edward received him with the slight haughtiness which always frightened Sir Joseph into outward assurance and a strong inward inclination to absolute surrender.

"I must begin by asking you to regard this interview as strictly confidential," said Edward.

Sir Joseph bowed graciously.

"I presume it relates to my leader in the *Express?* I was afraid you'd be chafed, Mr. Vane; but my well-known principles, and the predilections of the town——"

"I don't read the *Molesworthy Express*," said Edward, with unblushing falsehood. He looked the man up and down, taking his measure accurately, and noting the assailable

points in his moral armour. Very seldom was Edward mistaken in his opinion of a person's character.

"You and I are plain men, Sir Joseph; and you will like me, I think, to go straight to the point? I wish to speak to you about your very charming daughter. I suppose you are aware that by this time I know Miss Kidson pretty intimately?"

Sir Joseph saw only one construction possible to these opening expressions; he was flattered: obviously the man was going to propose for Grace. Now, though Miss Kidson knew all sorts of great folk, her lovers had not as yet issued from their ranks; nor had Tom Palmer (or Turold) come forward as her suitor; sorely against his will, Sir Joseph had admitted to himself that to waste further hopes on that perverse young man would be useless. But to marry the girl to Mr. Vane would be to seat her at any rate very near the throne of the Turolds, possibly, in the end, on the very throne

itself; for the obstructive lovers, Tom and Lilith, *might* be killed simultaneously in an earthquake or drowned at sea, and Edward Vane was the next heir.

Muttering to himself the proverb about a bird in the hand excelling two in the bush, Grace's father resolved instantly to accept the coming proposal; but he began to speak with what he intended for showy and dignified reluctance.

"Ah, ah! That's it, is it? My lady and I have had our suspicions, Mr. Vane, I must confess. Yes, I must confess, we have had our suspicions. But as for Grace—Miss Kidson herself now" (he shook his head), "she's taken up this notion of remaining single. I don't hold with the idea myself, but it's fashionable among the Advanced Women. And as to who the young fellow is, Mr. Vane, who's to argue her out of it——"

"Tom Palmer," said Edward, calmly.

"And that's exactly what I wished

myself," cried Sir Joseph, his mind a little distracted, "and had talked of a hundred times to Jack Palmer, his father, and to Tom, and to Gracie too, I believe. Yes, yes, she'd have taken him. Well, that's over. Tom's a fool, in my judgment. I should say you had *some* chance with Miss Kidson, Mr. Vane," said Sir Joseph.

"*I?* My dear sir, you mistake me," said Edward. "I have no designs on your charming daughter."

"Eh? What? What?" cried Sir Joseph. "What did you say a minute ago, Mr. Vane? Upon my word, you gave me to understand——"

"I said Miss Kidson and I were intimate friends; we have been corresponding——"

"*Corresponding!* Well, there you are, sir! If you and Miss Kidson have been corresponding, Mr. Vane, it's high time for Miss Kidson's father to ask what your intentions are, sir!"

Sir Joseph was decidedly nettled, and was

beginning to bluster. Edward took him with great coolness.

"Certainly. I have asked the favour of this interview, Sir Joseph, in order to explain my intentions. What I am about to propose will, I believe, be agreeable to Miss Kidson, for my intimate acquaintance with her has shown me in what direction her inclinations lie. As for my own prospects," added Edward, smiling coldly, "I need not enter upon them very particularly; but I am engaged to my cousin, Miss Turold."

"Well, I never! This beats everything!" exclaimed Sir Joseph. "Is that rascal, Tom Palmer, turned loose again, then?"

"I said I was engaged to Miss Turold. I did not say Miss Turold was engaged to me."

"Deuce take me, Mr. Vane, if I am able to understand what you say."

Edward, who had been lounging about the room, now drew a chair and sat down beside his guest.

"You had reasons of your own, Sir Joseph,

why Tom would have been a convenient son-in-law?"

"Why, yes!" He hesitated for a moment, wondering if Edward could by any chance have a guess about Tom's birth; then continued, "Palmer and I began life together, and have always been friendly. I've gone ahead of him socially, you know, but his article's just a touch better than mine, I'm bound to admit, and as we stand up in our shoes to-day, he's a richer man than me (though I've my doubts as to those games of Howe's, as I told you, Mr. Vane; but then Howe will get the sack any day I choose to tell Jack all *I* know of him). Well, Grace and the smaller business seemed to me a fair exchange for an everyday chap like Tom and the larger business. One son, one daughter; the same trade and friendliness. Palmer and Kidson, Kidson and Palmer; it sounds natural enough, *I* consider."

"Very much so, Sir Joseph."

"But they've had their 'eads turned, those

Palmers, father and son. It's taken some Christian patience to bear it meekly. I'd like to see 'em get a good setting down." Sir Joseph scratched his head contemplatively. "It riles me to think of a beauty like my Grace left on the stalk when Jack's boy is fixed to marry that 'igh and 'aughty young lady. It appears to me, Mr. Vane, that if you and Grace have been corresponding——"

"Thank you, Sir Joseph, I understand what you would say. But I think it would suit us all better if I could marry Miss Turold, to whom I have promised myself, and if your daughter could have your friend's son, Tom Palmer. What do you think?"

"That I don't see how it's to be worked, Mr. Vane," said Sir Joseph, with some excitement, however, his old wishes beginning to reassert themselves.

"Miss Turold," explained Edward, "is to marry young Palmer simply because her grandfather wants money, and has nothing

to sell but her. The match is liked by no one; and Tom himself is tired of it. One thing is quite certain: it won't come off unless the price agreed upon is paid and to the minute."

"Well, and who's to hinder its being paid, Mr. Vane?"

"You and I, Sir Joseph."

There was a pause, Edward smoking tranquilly.

"I'm blessed if I know what you're driving at," said Sir Joseph, feeling rather uncomfortable.

"Well, come upstairs, and I'll show you," replied Edward.

He took his visitor to the turret. It was midnight, and the servants, used to their master's late hours, had gone to bed. The house was silent, dark, and ghostly, and Sir Joseph did not half like it.

"Well, I never! What an extraordinary place!" said he, looking about. "And what in the world's the meaning of it all, Mr. Vane?

So long as you were a college professor working for your bread, I could understand it, but now you've come into your fortune——"

"One can't throw off one's profession in a day. But though I call myself professor, I never was more or less than the merest amateur. You recognize this light, Sir Joseph?"

"Odd if I didn't. It's my own. Combined Kerosine, and a pretty thing too."

"And this?" said Edward. "This is Palmer's Prepared Paraffin. You tell me it's superior."

"Not as to light, Mr. Vane. Only as to convenience."

"If you could get a light even more brilliant than yours, safer, cheaper, and cleaner than even his, it would supersede both, wouldn't it?"

"That's certain. But gas couldn't do it, and I don't believe the electric will either. I believe, and so does Palmer, that the mineral oils are of vast capabilities," said Sir Joseph, with pomposity.

"Well, look here," said Edward, removing the Combined Kerosine and the Prepared Paraffin lamps and lighting his new one. "Well?" he said calmly, as the wick gradually caught the flame.

"Good God!" gasped Sir Joseph, sinking backwards into a chair, when the flood of artificial sunshine had filled the room. "What, in heaven's name, is it? What is it?"

He covered his face with his hand, beads of perspiration rolling from his brow.

"Good God!" he exclaimed presently, "Palmer and me are ruined men. Our trade is gone from the day this appears in the market. Who's the patentee, Mr. Vane?"

Edward did not answer at once. He left his visitor full time to appreciate the new light's splendour. At last he came over and spoke with emphasis.

"Sir Joseph, there is no patent yet. The invention is mine. But I have no intention

of patenting it. I told you I was the merest amateur, and in my family we have a prejudice against buying and selling. What I wish to say to you is this: I will make you a present of my discovery."

"Me!" gasped Sir Joseph. "What did you say, sir? Me?"

"But on one condition only," continued Edward, calmly. "Hear it. It is nothing formidable. You are not to share this secret with Palmer, nor with his son, nor to admit them to any of the advantages resulting from it, *until Tom Palmer is married to your daughter.* You will let me have your decision in three days, Sir Joseph," ended Edward, rising and holding out his hand.

Sir Joseph pushed it away.

"But why, sir? What's the sense of such an absurd condition? The whole thing is ridiculous. Give it to me? Why, you can make your own fortune out of that lamp."

"I don't agree with you," said Edward.

"In my own eyes, and in the eyes of my circle, I should be ridiculous as the inventor of an oil; but I should not be ridiculous as Miss Turold's husband, which, with your help, is what I propose to become."

"And to gain your paltry end you'd make me the ruin of Jack Palmer—and he and I have been friends since we began life in the same shop?"

"You mistake, Sir Joseph. I haven't the smallest wish to injure old Mr. Palmer, for whom I entertain the heartiest respect. I only wish to save his son from an unsuitable marriage, which he dislikes himself. I think you will find everything fall out as you wish. At any rate, Sir Joseph, that's my condition. You may take it or leave it. I will give you one piece of information, however: *Palmer himself is on the track of this discovery*, and he hasn't any scruple about ruining *you*. If you reject my offer, my lamp goes into the fire. (No, it won't make an explosion even there; it's the tamest of

pets now.) And before a year is over, it, or something very like it, will appear in Palmer's shop—not in yours, Sir Joseph."

He held out his hand again, and Sir Joseph took it this time, but without cordiality.

"He'd make a precious supercilious son-in-law," thought Sir Joseph, stumbling down the turret stair on his way out. "*Shop*, indeed! It's a long day since either Jack Palmer or I kept a *shop*. Well, I'd a deal sooner have Tom in my family than him; let alone that it would be putting my girl at the Turold place, and if that wouldn't make this chap Vane laugh with the other side of his mouth I don't know what would."

CHAPTER V.

NEVERTHELESS Sir Joseph found it very hard to make up his mind. To use his own phrase, he could not stomach the transaction. There was somehow a scent of dishonesty about it.

Yet, surely, the little supercilious chap was a gentleman, and would suggest nothing actually dishonourable or shabby! Gentlemen were scrupulous on such points, and where a gentleman led the way an ill-bred man like himself might surely follow. Sir Joseph did not perceive that in the matter of "following" lay the precise difference between himself and Edward, who was quite capable of doing a mean thing of his own devising, but would not have been dragged

to it by wild horses at the bidding of any one else.

Edward had no notion himself of how strong a temptation he had set before Sir Joseph. He knew nothing of the facts which might make Tom Palmer's wife mistress of Turold Royal, the position for which, in her father's eyes, Grace was eminently suited. Nor did he know that all along Joe Kidson had been horribly jealous, not of Jack Palmer's greater wealth, but of his more inventive brains. Jack Palmer had invented his Prepared Paraffin; Joe Kidson had been shown his Combined Kerosine. The world knew that, and rated Kidson lower than Palmer accordingly. What more would not the world say if Palmer invented this glorious new light? But, on the other hand, how would the world applaud if Kidson came out as the inventor? He could trust Edward to keep the secret. Evidently Edward despised men who made inventions, himself included. He would give the

secret to his ally unreservedly; in fact, would have to do so if he wished the patent to be secure. Still, Sir Joseph could not stomach the transaction. It would be mean to Palmer; it would be a technical infringement of the patent laws, and it would be arrogating to himself an honour far from his due. Should he do it, or should he not?"

He consulted his wife; but afraid of telling too much, he did not put the case with any clearness before her, and there was no help in her ladyship. Then he spoke to Grace: a more sensible woman than her mother, and, moreover, concerned in the issue at stake. And lo! Grace's very unexpected reply was such as to make his temptation, strong before, a thousand times stronger! It became absolutely imperative now to secure Tom Palmer (or Turold) as her husband; for to this course Grace threatened a horrible alternative, and, apparently, only one.

"Papa," said the girl, when he had begun

by questioning her a little coarsely about her various suitors, "I have a confession to make to you!"

Sir Joseph nodded, and thought she was going to speak of Tom. Grace would have flown in the air first. She continued—

"Mamma and you are Evangelicals, papa. You have only lately joined the Church of England: Calvinists, I call you. Now, my dear father, I made no secret of the fact that at a very early age I discovered *no* Calvinism could ever satisfy me."

"What's all this about, Grace?" said Sir Joseph, impatiently. "You talked a deal of damned blasphemous nonsense, I remember, and I don't want to hear it again."

"Papa, you always refused to believe that I had thought seriously on religious matters. I don't know if *you* have done so or not. I should have expected a Liberal to carry Liberal views into theological questions. My mother's Calvinist creed seemed to me——"

"It's all stuff, and very wicked, profane stuff. Go and say your prayers, Grace."

"I did. Yet that did not save me from the blackest darkness of atheism."

"Grace, of all the conceited, ostentatious, feather-brained——"

"Papa, you must hear me. In the course of the last year I have been through great suffering; never mind its nature. I had found a substitute for religion in benefiting my fellow-creatures; but soon under the pressure of sorrow I realized, and quite sickeningly, that philanthropy without religion is hollow, and that nothing but religion is able to console when one is enduring mental anguish."

"All that sort of talk——" attempted Sir Joseph; but Grace continued, without allowing him to interrupt—

"Now, I am thankful to say, the cloud has lifted. I have been reading at first in despair, then with gradually dawning hope,

the works of the early Fathers, the history of the Church, the writings of contemporary leaders of the faith. I have understood that in the course of nature an inspired church is a necessity, and I have seen that such a Church exists."

"Well, well, well," said Sir Joseph, impatiently, "if you mean that you are going to attend church again and teach in the Sunday school, I'm glad to hear it. Now, please, attend to me."

"What I mean, papa, is this: I will no more struggle against the light now that it has come, than I could pretend to see when, under God's providence, the light was withdrawn. I have taken my resolution. I am going to profess myself a member of the Roman Catholic Church."

Sir Joseph jumped to his feet, and seized her arm, shaking it violently.

"What?" he cried; "what do you dare to say? What, miss?"

Grace turned rather pale, but she calmly

released herself, and spoke again in her measured and musical tones.

"And further, papa, I wish you to know that I shall probably enter a nunnery."

"I will kick you downstairs first," shouted Sir Joseph. "Who in the devil's name has put this into your head? A nunnery? Damn you!"

"I have thought it out for myself," said Grace, still paler; "you, papa, it was who bade me use my brains and think for myself."

"You're just like all the rest of the women; you think wrong. But don't tell me it's your own doing. Some Jesuit, some *priest* has been at you. It's that serpent Edward Vane! They told me he was a Papist, and you have been corresponding with him, you idiot!"

"Mr. Vane is, alas! an infidel; but it is true he first directed my attention to the Church in which he was brought up."

"In future I shall inspect your correspondence. It's impropriety. Well, you'd

better marry your Papist and get out of my house. Do you hear me?" shouted Sir Joseph. "You're to marry him—Vane—and have done with it."

"I am not going to marry," said Grace, with dignity. "I am convinced that for Women the single life is the noblest, and now a great wish overpowers me to bind my conviction with vows. My whole life in the world has become distasteful; I will be the Bride of Heaven."

"Bride of fiddlestick! Do you mean a nun?"

"Yes," said Grace, firmly, "a nun."

Sir Joseph was silent for a moment. Then he turned upon her sharply, touching her arm again.

"It's all because you've been cheated of Tom Palmer," he said angrily.

The sudden and rather brutal allusion was too much for Grace, whose high-strung composure was always apt to collapse suddenly. She turned crimson, then pale

again, with a swelling rising in her throat. She moved to the door, pausing to reply with dignity—

"In a measure, papa, you are right. I might have married Tom if he had wished it. Now, you will be kind enough never to mention the word 'marriage' to me again."

Sir Joseph was a little moved, for this was the touch of nature which "makes the whole world kin." He put his hand on her shoulder.

"Now, my girl, look here," he said, "don't you be in a hurry. I don't feel certain it's all over with Tom yet. Don't you be in a hurry."

Grace went away, and cried over her rosary like an ordinary inferior woman. And Sir Joseph stood with his hands in his pockets, thinking of Edward Vane's splendid light. A new temptation and one not at all common to man had taken him. If he didn't somehow, by hook or by crook, recapture Tom Palmer for Grace, this his

clever beautiful daughter, his pride, his one genuinely successful creation, instead of becoming the great lady which she deserved to be, would vanish away miserably as that most corrupt and loathly of all detestable things: a Roman Catholic nun. Uncertain before, Sir Joseph was now in a fever of doubt and agitation.

PART VI.

CONTRARY WINDS.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE Tom Palmer had fairly started for the far West, Mr. Turold breathed more freely. Insensibly, father and daughter settled down to their old comfortable ways and were good friends again. Lilith did not talk of her lover, except to Geraldine Mount Jocelyn. If she wrote him long letters and added little things to her trousseau, she yet strove her very best for these few months in everything to please her father. Mr. Turold took her to London for two months, and under Lady Caroline's wing Lilith had

a very gay time. She met with a good deal of admiration, and her position as Princess Royal was considered of interest. Rumour magnified the fame of the Turolds, and, indeed, Lilith and her father unconsciously magnified themselves, for their name and estate were to them important above measure, and out of the fulness of the heart, the mouth speaketh. Lilith moved through society always with a little atmosphere of state, always meeting with a little reverence, always accepting a little homage, without for a moment suspecting that these things were a free gift from the world and not by any means her right. It was all most delightful to Gilbert Turold, who saw in his daughter a lovely embodiment of the splendour of his race.

But the world was rather puzzled about the plebeian lover. Who was he? and what had become of him? and why was he never mentioned? He was a myth to every one but to Lilith herself; even Gilbert Turold

and Edward Vane were beginning to forget him. And Edward was always at his cousin's side, and half the people they met believed they were engaged.

Lilith enjoyed her taste of the season very much; and afterwards she paid a round of visits with her father, and then settled down with him at home, all perfectly comfortably. Ignoring the cause of dissension, they drew closer than ever the very real bond which united them. But the weeks passed on and on; and the original time fixed for the wedding was long past, and Tom's letters to Lilith, though no whit less affectionate, grew shorter and told less of his doing and thinking. For he was immersed in cares and anxieties, and had little time for love letters, and little to say except business details which he knew would not interest Lilith.

To Mr. Palmer he did write fully and often, but his letters were not cheerful. "I am not satisfied," he wrote first; then,

"we must prepare for losses;" then an account of a probable lawsuit; finally, a telegram—

"I have discovered something, and retired from the suit. Our claim in this matter is indefensible. Get rid of Jim. I am coming home."

What did all that mean? Mr. Palmer did not know, and could not find out from Howe, who was extremely cool and inclined to say sharp things of Tom. Mr. Palmer's anxieties were well awake now, and he was counting the hours till his son's return. Nevertheless, his smile was serene and benignant as ever, and there was no positive alarm on his countenance or in his heart. Preparing for losses did not mean so much to him just at present, as it might have done some other time. He had his secret cause of elation.

Mr. Palmer, on receipt of the telegram, put on his best coat and walked up to Turold Royal.

"Tom is on his way home, my dear," he said to Lilith.

The girl's eye sparkled, but she made little remark, for shyness' sake.

"I hope," said Gilbert Turold, with stiff courtesy, "your son has succeeded in the task you gave him?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Palmer, a shadow crossing his beaming face for a moment, "I can't in honesty say he's succeeded. I don't know what to make of it all, and that's the fact. Tom was, perhaps, a thought young for it, and I'd ought to have gone myself. It was a difficult matter."

Edward raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, then it wasn't your wish, it wasn't a dire necessity for Tom to have gone?"

The simple old man smiled, remembering his son's unselfishness.

"It was all his own wish, sir," he said warmly.

"Lilith," said Edward, playfully, "why did he go? Had you quarrelled?"

Lilith coloured and felt vexed. She had bidden her lover do his errand, if he thought it right, and had never doubted his good faith for a moment. But she had cried at the parting, and then had laughed and begged him not to fall in love with some charming American girl, cleverer and prettier and better dressed than herself. Edward's cynical suggestion vexed her, especially as it was made in Mr. Palmer's hearing.

When the old man had gone, Gilbert Turold hid behind a newspaper, greatly annoyed at the prospect of the enemy's return. Edward said to him in a low voice, behind the *St. James's Gazette :*

" I call it unpardonable in that old chap not to confess frankly that he has lost his money."

Then he sauntered towards Lilith and stood looking at her dolefully. The girl was not thinking of her cousin ; though momentarily vexed with him, she nowadays

regarded him as a staunch ally, not at all as Tom's rival. She knelt presently by her father, and pushed his *Gazette* away.

"Papa dear, Tom is coming home; and you are going to promise me not to be cross with us any more. And—you are going to promise another thing," continued Lilith, "that our wedding may be at once. At once, papa dear. Edward!"—she turned to her cousin appealingly—"do get him to promise."

"If you take my advice, you'll see Tom first," said Edward, dryly.

"Yes, yes," echoed Mr. Turold; "let us see Tom first."

"It's always the lady who settles the day," said Lilith.

"Not in this case," returned Edward, "or the gentleman wouldn't have run away from it."

"Edward, don't, please, say such stupid things. You know Tom hated it, and was obliged to go."

"Of course he said so to *you*. He has certainly stayed a long time."

Lilith turned her back on her cousin angrily.

"Papa, I want you to promise, because I know quite well that Tom's first words to me will be, 'we must be married at once now,' and I want to be able to answer, without any reservation at all, 'Yes, dearest, yes.'"

Mr. Turold said nothing, and tried to get his paper up again. Edward came over smiling, and holding in his hand a shabby little glove of Lilith's, which he had found on the table.

"A bet, Lilith, a bet to swell the trousseau. I'll give you three dozen of the longest and the best, if those *are* Tom's first words to you on landing."

Lilith pushed the glove away.

"Edward, what do you mean by these dull jokes? Go away. Do you suppose I would make bets about anything Tom does or says? Or that I shouldn't be quite

satisfied with it, whatever it is?" she ended vehemently.

"What Edward means, my dear," said Mr. Turold, soothingly, "is that if there is some little cloud over Mr. Palmer's affairs, you would not find your grandfather so ready——"

"Oh, what has grandpapa to do with it?" cried Lilith; "it would make no difference to Tom and me."

"For my part," said Edward, not smiling now, but looking at the girl with sad eyes full of cruel kindness, "I am not thinking of money difficulties. I am dreading others. Upon my honour, Lilith, I can *not* comprehend his having left you in this way, his dilatoriness in returning, his leaving you to learn from Mr. Palmer——"

"Edward, be quiet! I can't bear it!" cried Lilith. "Papa, do speak!" she said, flying to his arms.

He threw away his newspaper and clasped her in them.

"My dear little girl!" he said fondly, "my poor dear little girl! That's enough now, Edward," he added peremptorily.

But what were they pitying her for? Lilith really did not know; but some sort of spurious self-pity rose in her own heart. Could it be possible that Tom had met the charming, clever, beautifully dressed American girl with whom she had threatened him? and did Edward know something about it?

The fortnight that followed was wholly discomfortable to everybody. Lilith could settle to nothing, but hung restlessly about the windows listening to the blasts of autumn's wind tearing down the leaves and whistling round the angles and courts of the old house. To add to the general feeling of uneasiness, old Charles Turold was in a thorough bad humour, and seemed intent upon quarrelling with everybody.

"Edward Vane has been here, Gilbert," he cried, "saying the match is as good as

broken off. I'm not going to be opposed in this way. If your girl is false and doesn't take the man I've chosen for her, she shall repent, and so shall you, you ungrateful ass!"

"If the match is off," said Gilbert, "it is neither Lilith's doing nor mine."

"Is the fellow trying to jilt her, then?" roared the old man. "What, in the devil's name, did you let him escape for?"

"He is raving," thought the son; "but how provokingly sane he keeps on other topics!"

Nor did Lilith find any more comfort in the old despot than her father did.

"Grandpapa," she said coaxingly, "Tom is on his way home now. And papa—is just as bad as ever. I think there's a sort of crisis coming. Whatever happens, dear grandpapa, you won't desert Tom and me?"

He looked at her with his keen and vigilant eyes, in which was no faint sign of dotage.

"On his way home, is he? There are storms about now. It would give me the greatest possible pleasure to hear that the fellow had gone to the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, grandpapa!" shivered Lilith, who had indeed trembled all night listening to the hurricane, and thinking of her dear lover on the ocean; and she sighed and told herself, "Every one is against us now. But courage! it will, it must soon be over now."

At length came the day of Tom's arrival, and Lilith appeared at breakfast with her hat on, and said she was going to meet him. Mr. Turold sipped his coffee, looking at her over the edge of the cup, in the silence which to Lilith was more chafing than open opposition.

"I think Edward will come with me, papa," she said, with an imploring look at her cousin, whose attitude was still that of Mr. Facing-both-ways.

"I—well, you know, Lilith, to say the truth, it seems to me a chance if Tom will like your going."

"But I *know* he will like it!" said the girl.

She was overruled. There was a solemn Turold ceremony on hand for the middle of the day: the taking of the Wroth Silver. Lilith was to represent her grandfather, and was told, truly enough, that time would not admit of her journey to London.

"Tom will, I *suppose*," said Edward, "come at once to see *you*."

"How can I talk to him for the first time in the middle of all those people?" said Lilith, "and there is plenty of time. I am sure there is. We could be back at eleven."

"If Mr. Palmer had chosen to fulfil his engagement to you, my love," said her father, "he would have been here to-day in a recognized position. As matters stand —a little equivocally, eh?—I for my part

should prefer his not arriving till our ceremony is over."

Lilith said no more. Tom had not absolutely asked her to meet him, and she felt she could explain to him; explanations were impossible with her father, who seemed determined to misunderstand everything. And why had Edward given up helping her?

The Wroth Silver ceremony was important to the Turolds: one of the ancient customs which marked the fame of the family. Payment was made by fifteen parishes as an acknowledgment of old Charles Turold's claim to certain waste lands and his kindness in letting cattle pass over certain roads and fields. The ceremony took place every five years, and was matter of interest to the whole county. To Lilith it seemed little less majestic than the opening of Parliament by her gracious Majesty.

She dressed herself very prettily in a pale thick dress, heavily trimmed with chinchilla,

her mother's legacy. The fur looked suitable to the young princess on a public occasion, and her father nodded approval. She drove him to the appointed place in her own pony-carriage; followed by a miniature procession of carriages, and with an outrider in the person of Lord Mount Jocelyn, who trotted on a prancing chestnut by Lilith's side. For some distance they climbed a narrow lane up a steep and densely wooded hill. The day was fine after the storm and the sun shone brightly; everywhere autumn's amethyst mist softly veiled the reddened beeches and oaks, and bathed the distant hills in a deep transparent blue.

At last they reached a bare space on the brow of the hill, whence was a wide prospect over the surrounding country, Turold Royal lying below, with its undulating surface and noble trees, the Court itself partly visible on the right. Five years ago, Lilith, a slip of a girl, with a keen, awakening interest in her life, had looked round and round over her

inheritance, admiring it, loving it, exulting in it; and had felt a childish delight in the fact that from this point there was no house anywhere in sight but her own. Now there was another; a great, staring, red villa, naked and obtrusive. Undeniably it spoiled the view.

On this bare-topped hill with the wide prospect, was a broken cross and a few lichen-covered, ruined stones, sole remains of a monastic establishment of some distinction in the hoar backward and abysm of time. Behind it were mounds, said to be the graves of Sir Ffulke and Sir Gilbert Turold, crusading heroes who had died at the abbey; and a little behind these again was a stone marking the limit of the hundred. Here stood a lawyer in wig and gown; around him, in unwonted smock frocks, fifteen representatives from the parishes of the hundred; behind them a crowd of neighbours and spectators, all with smiling and curious faces. Lilith left her carriage; and, escorted by her

father and followed by her suite, advanced to the boundary stone. The lawyer, watch in hand, waited till the hands pointed to noon; then waved the people aside so as to exhibit clearly the abbreviated shadow falling northward from the cross. Then in a strident voice he read the long-winded charter of Wroth Silver given in the time of Richard II. Lilith, representing her grandfather, was next led to the foot of the cross, where she took her seat, blushing a good deal and glancing at her father to see if she were properly playing her part. And now the representatives of the villages advanced in turn, knelt before the Princess Royal, kissed her hand, and laid in it silver coins, which Lilith transferred to a green brocaded bag of great size and antiquity, held for her by the lawyer. When she had amassed 18*s.* 5*d.*, partly in crown pieces, partly in silver pennies, partly in shillings and sixpences, a little girl, dressed like the bag in green brocade, presented a bouquet of oak leaves

and acorns, and Lilith kissed the little face under the close green cap with much grace, and so ended the ceremony. Miss Turold rose, and the spectators, high and low, pressed round to touch her hand, and to offer rather meaningless congratulations; and Lilith smiled and blushed and looked pleased and pretty, delighting her father.

But in her heart the princess was uneasy. Where was Tom? Surely he must have arrived by this time? She had left word with Yates that her lover was to follow her to the cross on the hill. She scanned the crowd again and again, but there was no sign of the returned traveller. Could anything have happened?

Gilbert Turold now rose, and in the name of the lord of the hundred invited the lawyer, and the brocaded girl with the brocaded bag, and the representatives, and all friends and neighbours, to a collation at Turold Royal, whither the whole party trundled away as quickly as possible in

some disorder; headed, however, by the lawyer in his wig, and the fifteen men in smocks, and the little girl like Judas carrying the bag, who had all some sense of the solemnity fitting the occasion. Soon they were all assembled in the Banqueting Hall of the Court, where was displayed all the antique silver on the polished oak tables, and where on the dais was old Charles Turold himself in his wheeled chair, his son and Lilith standing beside him. The guests were seated in the ancient order, some above, some below the massive silver salt-cellars; and grace and an adaptation of the Bidding Prayer were recited by Mr. Trevylyan. Then the old man wished them all good day and prosperity in the next five years, and withdrew. Gilbert took his seat in the post of honour, with Miss Turold on one side and the little green Judas on the other, and the banquet began. There were still a few vacant chairs, and Lilith kept one near herself unoccupied, still hoping

that Tom might come. But the breakfast pursued its course, and then came toasts and speeches, till the little girl fell asleep and Princess Lilith thought her back would break in two for very weariness. And then came a great exhibition of the house and parade of its treasures; and the long hours passed slowly on, but still there was no sign whatsoever of Tom Palmer.

In the late afternoon she sent Edward to inquire at Silcote Dene if anything had been heard of the traveller. He brought back a verbal message from a servant: "Mr. Tom had arrived by the 12.6, and at four had gone to town with Mr. Palmer."

"I am so sorry, Lilith," said Edward; "don't stone your unfortunate messenger."

Weary of ceremony and very tired, Lilith succumbed. "Oh, I did think he'd have come to see me first!" she exclaimed in her disappointment. And Edward shrugged his shoulders, and uttered irritating words of false sympathy.

Lilith came to dinner in the sort of simple white frock which Tom had first loved her in, and with his diamonds round her throat. She was a strangely dressed figure, but she cared neither for Lady Mount Jocelyn's laugh nor for Lady Caroline's frown. And the slow hours passed on, and there was dinner and music and a little dancing, but still Tom never came, nor sent one word of excuse, nor one word of love. And when Lilith went to bed that night she cried with weariness and disappointment.

CHAPTER II.

TOM had landed, yes, with his pockets full of presents for his sweetheart, and his eyes bright with expectation as he scanned the strangers who were there to receive their friends. But it was Mr. Palmer who met him, not Lilith. It was much what he had expected; still Tom was disappointed. They started homewards, missing a train, and sitting for an hour at Waterloo.

"It's a rare pleasure to me to have you back again, Tom," said Mr. Palmer; "and I've a piece of good tidings for you, that will more than make up for any bad news you bring me."

"Not the mare's nest, father?"

"Hush!" said Mr. Palmer, his face beaming, "not one word till we get home!"

Then they talked of Howe.

"He is dishonest," said Tom. "You must get rid of him."

"If he's been dishonest—my dear lad, I can't bear to hear you utter such a thing—I'd sooner employ him myself than hand him on to any one else; and it's clear I can't cut my wife's own niece's husband adrift after he has served me faithfully for years. It was my fault for putting temptation in the poor fellow's way. We'll go into the matter with him thoroughly, Tom: you and I and he, privately. 'If thy brother sin against thee, tell him his fault between thee and him *alone*.' Eh? 'If he repent, thou hast gained thy brother.' I could never endure to be the first to cast a stone at a man. I'd bear any loss sooner."

Tom was silent.

When they reached home, the lover refused to see or do anything till he had been to Lilith. Mr. Palmer could not give him up yet, and they went together to Turold Royal.

By this time it was quite half-past two; and Yates met them with the information that all the family, and all the quality, were at the banquet in the Great Hall with the dais, and the gallery, and the vaulted roof; and he set the door ajar to let them look in. Tom saw what seemed to him like a wedding-breakfast, with Lilith in the most imposing place, her father on one side and Edward Vane on the other, while somebody's health was being drunk with effusion. Yates, who was rather tipsy, gave a grandiloquent account of the day's doings; describing Miss Turold as a Virgin Queen surrounded by a princely court of feudal retainers, like the history of England; and wouldn't Mr. Palmer please to come in? every one being welcome to-day, high or low, and Hail Fellow well met; and to eat the first of the doe

venison, and to drink the loving cup out of the golden tankard.

Tom saw below the salt the young man from the Molesworthy ironmonger's in a spotted necktie; but he also saw Lilith, all silver and lace, and Edward in a frock-coat, with delicate flowers in his button-hole. He thought of his own travelling suit, and of the many eyes which would watch the greeting between himself and his bride. Under the circumstances he did not feel absolutely secure of a welcome.

"Tell Miss Turold I came," he said to Yates, "and that I will return later when this business is over."

Yates gave the message to Edward, who did not pass it on. Should Lilith inquire into it, Yates's intoxication would be an explanation of any miscarriage.

"Now, Tom, now!" said Mr. Palmer, bringing his son home again.

It was his hour of triumph now, and the lover smothered his private impatiences.

"Mother, mother!" shouted Mr. Palmer, till his wife had run downstairs; and then, all three, they went into the laboratory together, and Mr. Palmer, from sheer force of habit, rolled up his sleeves and put on his leather apron. "It's new to mother too, Tom," he said. "I waited to show you both at once. Sit you down there; and, Polly, don't you be touching nothing. There's nothing safe in this room; if it ain't explosive, it's poison; and if it ain't poison, it's dirt; and with one of them you'll do a mischief to yourself or to some one else. Tom, shut down the shutters, and block all the chinks with the sand-bags. Look where you're going first, and don't try to get back to your chair in the dark or you'll be knocking something over. Now, hold your tongues, the two of you."

He lighted a lamp, his fingers shaking with excitement, and for a moment left the room in darkness, except for a faint glimmer at the wick.

"It's a poor thing," laughed Tom, his hand on Mr. Palmer's shoulder—"a dead failure."

"You may turn it up yourself," said Mr. Palmer, guiding his son's fingers to the lamp. Then the room filled with the same exquisite artificial sunshine by which Edward Vane had dazzled Sir Joseph Kidson.

"Father, father!" exclaimed Tom, "we knew you'd do it! but who ever dreamed of anything like this!"

Mr. Palmer sat down on his wooden stool, holding the hands of his wife and his son, and he laughed in sheer delight till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"That's worth something, Tom, I take it!" he said; "and I've kept the secret, my lad, that you might be the first person to see it, after all the trouble you've had for me this six months. I'm a made man, Tom; and don't you look glum over the Boisee job. If Mr. Turold takes fright about that, I give you leave to tell him of this little wedding present."

"No telling could give a notion of it," said Tom; "it's the kind of light has been seen only in dreams before. Can you make an unlimited supply, father?"

"As long as there's petroleum to be had," said Mr. Palmer, rubbing his hands. "Bless you, I ought to have made it years ago. It's pretty near the same mixture as the Prepared Paraffin. What stuck me was getting the better of its explosiveness. I had this light to all appearance in March, but so dangerous, I nigh blew up the house a dozen times; and the remedy so simple, I laughed like I'm laughing to-day when I'd hit on it. It's safe as a church now. And it's a new principle lamp too for economy's sake, and so easy a child can manage. Smell it, Tom. Ain't it a pleasant scent? Fit for Miss Lilith's pocket-handkerchief, eh? It's good-bye to candles for ever. Look at my little hand-lamp there. Ain't that a pretty toy? Lights up in a moment, and will burn for forty-eight hours on end.

Then there's cooking. I've a design for a stove to boil a kettle in five minutes. Of course it burns a little hot. That's why I don't feel so sure of getting the theatres as I do the ship-signals and the lighthouses, and the private dwellings and the street lamps. The incandescent light is its rival; but—I may be partial—I'd say my light beats it in brilliance and pleasantness, and at present, at least, it can be produced at a tenth of the expense."

Tom was gravely turning the wick up and down and trying experiments with wondering admiration.

"I should say there was absolutely no question that it beats every one of the old lights to fits," he said. "I'd like to be you, dad, to have invented it. And you have told no one?"

"Not a soul. But, Tom, remember what I said to you: we've got to share this with Kidson. I'd never forgive myself if I damaged my oldest friend. He mustn't

even feel an anxiety. Before I do a thing about the patent, we'll go to him, Tom, and tell him what's going to happen, and offer him partnership. There'll be plenty for you and Lilith. Little Grace must have share of the good things going."

"Of course," said Tom, heartily.

Some one was knocking, and a voice was calling, "Mr. Palmer, sir! there's a telegram, sir."

"Go and get it, Tom. No, stay; we'll put the light out first. It's from Jim, about the agreement with Stirke."

He dawdled, playing with his dear new lamp and chatting about trifles. Telegrams were no rarity in the business-man's house.

"I suppose, Tom, you'll say I ought to have seen Stirke and Ransom myself. Jim has got that matter into his hands completely. The fact is, for the last two years I have been making an idol of my lamp. I've prayed against it many a time; but

there, it's all turned out for the best. I'm thinking I'll rebuild the church steeple now and give 'em a new painted window. That's like the box of ointment the woman gave our Lord. But I've always had a sympathy too with the men who rebuked her and spoke up for the poor. Maybe He'll let me build almshouses for His poor too, to keep 'em out of the workhouse. I always remember how my old grandfather died in the workhouse, cut off from his old wife, and looked down upon; and here am I with my carriage, and everything the heart of man could covet. I think the Lord would see nothing but gratitude in my heart, Tom, if I tried to make Him some acknowledgment."

"My notion," said Tom, "would be a new organ in your church, especially if I'm to play on it. Now I'll fetch the telegram."

He opened it leisurely while Mr. Palmer was taking off his apron and still thinking of steeples and almshouses.

"Good God, father! Attend to this!" exclaimed Tom, seizing his arm; and he read aloud:

"Come at once. The works are on fire."

CHAPTER III.

TOM, darting off to London with Mr. Palmer, confided a message for Lilith to his mother; the good lady was distracted and forgot all about it. Consequently Miss Turold spent a lonely evening and cried when she went to bed. Next morning she came down late to breakfast, afraid to look at her letters, lest there should be none from her lover. The fear was justified. Tom had taken no notice of her existence, and her toast and sardines tasted to poor Lilith like gravel. Edward and Mr. Turold had already finished their breakfast, and the former had got hold of a newspaper.

"Great fire in the city," he read out; and

then, "Bless me! Lilith, Gilbert, listen! 'Palmer's Prepared Paraffin Works burned to the ground.'"

"Edward!" cried Lilith, snatching the paper from her cousin, "has anything happened to Tom?"

Edward relinquished the paper, but both he and Mr. Turold read over the girl's shoulder, she being far too much frightened to understand a word.

"'Great loss of life,'" read Edward in his measured tones. "Turn over the page, Lilith. Dear me! how dangerous these places are. Of course, it would burn like a tar barrel."

"Papa, I can't bear it!" cried Lilith. "Oh, papa, tell me the worst at once. Is he dead? Is he burned to death?"

"No, my child, no," said Mr. Turold. "Tom is all right you may be quite sure. Here is the list of fatalities—all the names pleasantly unfamiliar."

He spoke very kindly. For all his dislike to Tom he felt that to read in the *Times*

of his death by fire would be a most disagreeably tragic method of riddance.

Lilith sat down again, crying softly and partly reassured.

"This will mean further losses to old Palmer," said Edward. "I shouldn't wonder if it ruined him."

"Isn't there one word about Tom, papa?" asked Lilith.

Mr. Turold read aloud a long account of the disaster, written in the gloating style of a reporter, and only fragmentarily interesting to Lilith. The fire had originated in the room of Mr. Howe the manager, who had been consuming papers in his grate at an early hour. He had left at noon, and at three smoke was observed issuing from one of his windows. The fire was soon in possession of the adjoining apartments, and had spread to the stores and warehouses, with their "intolerably inflammable contents." "Soon everywhere combustion reigned." And so on for three columns. At last came mention of Tom.

"Mr. Palmer and his son (the latter only just returned from the United States) were telegraphed for at once, and were soon on the spot, rendering material assistance by their energy and presence of mind. Mr. T. Palmer worked with the firemen, and himself gallantly rescued two of the workmen from a horrible death, finally sinking insensible from the smoke among the burning rafters, from which he was with difficulty removed and put into the hands of the doctors in attendance. Mr. Howe was not seen on the premises, and it is now conjectured that this gentleman is among the missing."

"Papa," interrupted Lilith, "don't—don't read that. Tell me what it says of Tom."

Edward rose.

"I will go to Silcote Dene for you, Lilith, and inquire."

The girl sprang up gratefully.

"Take me with you, please—please, dear Edward."

They went all three; Lilith, with pale face, and straining eyes occasionally turned for an anxious perusal of her father's face. She was taken rapidly to her lover's home, only to learn that he was not there, and that Mrs. Palmer had been summoned to join her

husband and son at a hotel in London, Mr. Palmer—or was it Mr. Tom?—being too much knocked up for the railway journey.

"Oh, papa, papa!" cried Lilith; "let me go there, then. I *know* it is Tom who is hurt! I must go and learn what has happened."

"Edward shall go, my love," suggested her father, "and telegraph to you."

"Oh no. I must go. You forget I haven't even seen him!"

"Well—well—" said Mr. Turold, disregarding Edward's shrug of disapprobation.

So they toiled up to London, the three of them, in the train; and strangers wondered a little what had happened to the pale and frightened girl.

"I think we have made a mistake," said Edward, as their cab stopped at an old-fashioned commercial inn in Calthorpe Street, known to Mr. Palmer from his boyhood; "this is no place for Lilith."

"Never mind," said Mr. Turold, still kind to his daughter.

"Oh, Edward, do make haste," said Lilith; "send up a message that I am here."

A dirty-looking waiter in his shirt-sleeves came forward, and vanished again with Edward's message.

"He says Tom is all right," said Edward, returning to the cab. "I wouldn't get out, Lilith, till he comes down."

She shut her eyes and leaned back with a sigh of relief. He was all right! But Edward, as a matter of fact, had sent to Tom only the bald information that some friends would be glad if he could see them, without giving any names at all. The dirty waiter reappeared, and said, bluntly:

"The gent says he's engaged, and can't attend to no else at present."

"Well!" exclaimed Edward, with indignation; "we can go home after that, I should think!"

"Papa," said Lilith, sitting up, "I am certain he does not understand it is I."

Mr. Turold took a card and wrote on it, "Come and speak to Lilith for one moment."

"Take that to Mr. Thomas Palmer," he said dryly; and Edward shrugged his shoulders again.

That message brought Tom at once. His arm was in a sling; his hair singed; there was a red mark across his brow, and his clothes, after the night's work, had a dishevelled appearance, not lost upon Edward, who had never looked untidy in his life not even when he fell into the hole at Koorneh.

In a cab, at the door of a tenth-rate hotel, a person in dirty shirt-sleeves looking on, her hero in this damaged condition, which was yet far from romantic disablement, it was not an ideal meeting after a half-year's separation; and, indeed, though Tom smiled at her lovingly, his expression quickly settled back into that of irrelevant consideration which it had worn as he descended.

"Dearest!" said Tom, taking her hand and pressing it between both of his.

But the girl could not utter a word, could only look at him with piteous eyes; and there were too many listeners; and Tom had too many things to say, so that he knew not where to begin. Mr. Turold came to the rescue.

"This has been a bad job, Tom. You're not hurt? We read of your prowess in the paper, and this child took fright. None the worse, eh?"

"I'm all right," said Tom; "my father is rather done up, I am afraid. He has hurt his eyes——"

Lilith interrupted.

"Tom, your arm is burned. I know it. And the paper said you were nearly smothered. I *must* know, Tom."

"Oh, a miss is as good as a mile in being smothered. My arm is a little burned—nothing to signify."

"I have been so unhappy!" sighed Lilith. "Can't we come in, Tom?"

He hesitated, for he had a hundred and fifty things to do; the doctor and the insurance agents were here; and there was no waiting-room suitable for Lilith.

"You are insured, I suppose?" said Mr. Turold, understanding these difficulties better than Lilith did.

"Oh yes, partially. But I fear it seems doubtful if we can establish our claim. They have strict rules, these insurance people, and it looks as if Howe had let himself forget them yesterday. I'm afraid I ought to go back," said Tom, rubbing his forehead with a dreary smile; "it wouldn't do to offend the agents, and my father is not able to see them himself."

Lilith was hardly listening; she would have sympathized about poor Mr. Palmer's hurts, but claims and agents and insurance seemed to her dry business details, pure "men's matters," for which her ears were not required.

"We mustn't keep you," said Edward, courteously.

"Oh, Tom! couldn't you come home with us?" exclaimed Lilith, impulsively, thinking of poor Tom's weariness and the joy she would take in dressing his wounded arm. She regretted the words at once on hearing his answer.

"My dearest, how could I?" said Tom, almost hurt.

They parted, and Lilith leaned back in her corner and closed her eyes again, hoping no one would speak.

"I'm afraid Tom was thinking more of his insurance than of you, Lilith," said Edward.

CHAPTER IV.

TOM had known no more of the fire after being lifted senseless out of the smoke, his hand still clutching the charred form of the now dead boy he had been carrying when the faintness overcame him.

He opened his eyes in the private ward of a hospital, and for some time was content to lie quiet, wondering dreamily where he was and if anything were the matter. On the whole he rather fancied himself back in his steamer cabin expecting daylight and the coming of Lilith. Then came recollections of his father's beautiful lamp and of Lilith sitting like a queen among flower-decked guests, and he himself shut out;

then a sense of grander blaze than even that of the new lamp, as though Prepared Paraffin had burst out with a fury at the thought of being superseded.

After which came a nurse to administer restoratives and to dress his arm; and then Tom fell asleep for several hours, and woke comparatively restored. The doctors wanted to keep him quiet in the hospital, but Tom was far too restless to agree, and soon Mr. Palmer came to see him and to take him away. Half asleep and in the dim light of a wintry morning, the son did not at first notice more amiss with the old man than a kind of tremulous fatigue.

"Thank God! you are spared to me, Tom," said Mr. Palmer, kneeling by the bedside. "Oh, my boy, my boy! If I had lost you!"

"Dear dad, I wasn't even in danger, that I know of. But that poor little chap I dropped back into the blazes! I knew he was done for when I felt my head going. I

can think of nothing else. Was he the only one, I wonder?"

"I would to God he were the only one, Tom! And what's worse, there are some of them who are not dead, but burned into living cinders. Six poor wretches got down to the water and jumped into it—the worst they could do, but mad with pain, Tom. I have just seen them: more like charred logs than human creatures."

"Good God!" said Tom, ashamed of his own slight injuries, and beginning to dress.

"What about Howe?" he asked.

"Burned, Tom. Burned to death, our poor old Jim. I have been to Louisa; I had to tell her. It's a hard thing to tell a woman her husband has been killed in your service. She and her children must make their home with us; and, Tom, never you let her guess the poor fellow was come under a cloud lately. We'll forget all about that now."

"Poor old Jim!" said Tom; "in a way, it's

the best thing could have happened for his reputation. But he must have been mad, or drunk, or something, for, according to Philipps, he deliberately set his desks in a blaze. What was he after, I wonder?"

They left the hospital together, and Tom became aware gradually that Mr. Palmer, while posing as the uninjured person, was leaning on him more and more heavily, or crouching in the corner of the vehicle, his eyes shaded with his hand. Once something like a cry broke from him.

"We'll just go home to mother," he said, though he had designed fifty works of necessity first.

But they did not get farther than the little inn in Calthorpe Street; and Tom asked for a room, and noticed how the old man groped his tottering way to it.

"Let me look at your eyes, dad," said Tom, when Mr. Palmer had sunk into a chair, with a long stifled groan.

"That's it," he murmured, "my old eyes.

For the last ten minutes they have been unbearable."

One glance was enough for Tom. He sent to the nearest doctor and telegraphed for his mother.

All the rest of the day, in a darkened room, bandaged and in agony, Mr. Palmer lay, holding his wife's hand; and Tom went in and out looking after everything. He engaged temporary offices, got the men together, made inquiries and investigations, and took everything on his own shoulders, his father being incapacitated and Howe missing. It was all so new to the inexperienced young general that his head ached with mere hard thinking, while his damaged arm annoyed him at every moment and the severe physical trial of last night had left its own fatigue. He had had no time to write to Lilith; her visit could not but seem to him a little inopportune. If he was not cold to her, at least he was distracted; and unreasonably he resented the

intrusion of Mr. Turold, and especially that of Edward.

"To see the nakedness of the land ye are come!" cried his irritation, as he endured his rival's calm courtesy.

And there was no place he could take his sweetheart to for a moment alone, that they might fall into each other's arms and heal each other's wounded spirits by the touch of loving lips. The visit was little more than a failure, so Tom felt; and so, alas! did Lilith also.

"The most acute inflammation," pronounced the oculist, "and the whole system very dangerously depressed. At his age neither the sight nor the brain is to be trifled with. Inflammation feeds on excitement; you must keep him quiet and not let him be worried."

"The prescription is a little difficult," said Tom, "but we will do our best."

After this, even to consult Mr. Palmer was impossible, and having solely his own

judgment to rely on, Tom felt far from certain that he had said the right things to the insurance agents, for instance.

"Lord have mercy, Mr. Tom!" said Philipps, one of the upper subordinates when these men were gone, "I'm afeard we've ruined the governor. If you'd given me an 'int that my words was of consequence, I'd have found some lies glib enough."

"Oh, embarking in a course of lies never pays," said Tom. "You had to tell what you knew. It's a piece of confounded bad luck, but I expect we must face it. As to ruin—nonsense! Now tell me everything you can about Mr. Howe."

"Indeed, sir," said Philipps, "I've been hoping and expecting to have that task set to me. I've been uneasy in my mind this some time back, and so's others. But where *is* Mr. 'Owe? that's what I want to come at. He'd never have been so silly as to get himself burned, not with all the cash he had about him yesterday morning; and if burned

he is, I'm thinking there'll be some trace of all that money, for it wasn't in paper, but in good hard gold which he'd been scraping together this way and that, by fair means and foul, this some weeks; and what for, I want to know? I ask you, sir, what did he want with money in that fashion? and what's he gone and done with himself now, when he might be some use to us?"

Rather startled, Tom hurried to Howe's residence in Brunswick Square. The blinds were all drawn down, as if a coffin were in the house, and the knocker was muffled. Still Louisa had not exactly the air nor the appearance of a woman suddenly and shockingly bereaved of an affectionate husband. Tom went straight to the point.

"Louisa, where is Jim?"

She was naturally an honest creature, and though she had learned her lesson she could not repeat it fluently. Tom had soon extorted the truth from her.

"You don't know where he is, Louisa?

But you know he is safe and with money in his pocket. He had been meditating this step?"

"I don't know that he had, Tom," cried Louisa, wringing her hands. "It was when he found the place was on fire he couldn't stand it any longer. Yes, he ran home for a minute to bid me good-bye, but he didn't tell me much. He said it would ruin poor uncle. He said if you hadn't meddled he'd have pulled uncle through, but that now he must throw up the game. He's more to be pitied than any one, Tom. He was trying to make uncle's fortune—why, he *had* done it, you know he had—and now all of a sudden everything has gone to pieces."

"Well," said Tom, "I can't say I feel much pity for Jim at present. I can't forgive him the tricks he's been playing with our reputation. But father will, I am sure, be more lenient than any man under the same circumstances. Jim should show some faith in him. Let him come back and at least

share our misfortunes and use his wits in trying to help us out. Father said to me yesterday, that he would rather suffer extensive loss than disgrace a man who had served him so long. I don't say it's altogether my own feeling, but in acting for father I must try to act according to his views. You can tell Jim that."

Louisa, however, had no means of communicating with her husband; and Tom left her convinced that the wife and children were for the present deserted and thrown on Mr. Palmer's ready charity.

The son walked slowly away lost in thought. Howe then had gone, having robbed his employer directly of a few hundred pounds, which seemed a paltry enough trifle. But there was very evidently more to be found out, and the man himself believed that he had effected Mr. Palmer's ruin.

"The new lamp will pull us through, I suppose," said Tom to himself, "but it's a literal beginning again."

It was midnight before he sat down to write a love letter to Lilith. Even then he had to be brief, for Mr. Palmer was in great suffering and the son wanted to be with him. So there was no letter for Lilith on the breakfast-table next morning; and when later in the day it came, it was not precisely the letter she had hoped for. Naturally; Tom had so much to think of just now besides his lonely and waiting bride! he had not time, was not in the mood for childish endearments and the silly delightful phrases of nine months ago! Lilith understood all that; if he had not sent her a love letter exactly, he had sent her the letter a man might write to his dear and trusted wife, and she knew she ought to be proud of such mark of confidence and security. None the less, she was disappointed.

"Well, my dear," it was her father's voice, and her father was still anxious to be kind, "what does he say?"

"You can read it, papa, if you like," said

Lilith. When had she ever shown one of her lover's letters before?

It was a good while since Mr. Turold's courting days, and he did not notice the possible coldness which was troubling Lilith. He did think the letter gave a very poor account of Mr. Palmer's position.

When, several days later, the lover at last appeared to visit his mistress, Mr. Turold took care himself to hear the young man's first words. Edward also was present, and, as Tom entered, he said:

"Lilith, remember your wager."

"I made no wager, Edward," retorted Lilith; then turned to her lover: "Tom dear, your poor arm, is it better?"

"Oh yes," said he, moving his fingers stiffly; "it hurts confoundedly, and they say that's a good sign. What's the wager?"

"And Mr. Palmer's eyes?" said Lilith.

"Ah, poor father! I'd have been here sooner, Lilith, but for him."

Something in Tom's voice brought a sympathizing lump in the girl's throat.

"Oh, how sorry I am!" she faltered; but it is a question if Tom heard her trembling tones, for Mr. Turold interrupted to ask what doctor was in attendance.

When Tom named the first oculist of the day, Edward explained that he was a man fond of heroic remedies, who had destroyed the sight of one of the Erpingham ladies and ruined her with his bill. For the first time in his life, Tom felt a bill to be a consideration, and hastened to change the subject.

"You haven't explained the wager, Lilith."

Edward smilingly replied for her.

"My cousin is shy. She and I have a bet on the probable date of your wedding."

"No, Tom, I haven't!" cried Lilith; "it's nonsense of Edward's."

An awkward little pause followed, and Tom flushed a little.

"We can hardly avoid a further delay," he said bluntly; "it's a most horrid nuisance."

"Lost!" said Edward. "Lilith, you have lost your bet."

Tom looked at her inquiringly.

"Edward, you *know* I never made any bet!" cried Lilith, indignantly.

"Oh, excuse me, Princess," he answered, with a bow; "I'll let you off, if you like, but we made the bet." Then he turned to Tom. "You have said precisely what I prophesied you would say," he observed, dryly.

Tom stared; and Lilith, greatly frightened, slipped her hand into her lover's.

"Betting on a certainty is hardly fair," said Tom. "I wish any one would tell me how our marriage could take place immediately."

"The question is," said Mr. Turold, rising and standing on the hearthrug, "whether it is to take place at all. Will you oblige me by dropping my daughter's hand and listening to me?"

"Papa!" cried Lilith.

"You can go away, my dear, if you don't

like to hear it, but I must speak to Tom. Edward, take her away. Tom and I get on best alone."

Lilith was sent away; but Edward after a minute or two lounged in again.

"Well, sir?" said Tom.

"I suppose," began Mr. Turold, rather feebly, "this has come as a great surprise to you?"

"What has? The fire? We always thought a fire very possible. Of course we hadn't expected to lose the insurance."

"It is ridiculous," said Edward, "to pretend that this fire is your only disaster."

Tom stared again, for this tone was most distinctly hostile.

"It is quite disaster enough," he replied; "our stock in trade has vanished, and it's a kind of substance not to be replaced at a moment's notice in the next street, even if we had a place to store or to work it in. Of course, that's all dead loss. Then, my father is not in a condition even to give

advice, and our manager has taken this moment to bolt, after, I fear, robbing us pretty extensively; and partly by luck, partly by judgment, he has to a great extent destroyed our books and papers, so that many of our claims we may never be able to make good; while, having been speculating in my father's name, he has let us in for debts which will be, to say the least of it, very inconvenient at this moment to meet."

"And under these circumstances," said Gilbert Turold, "do you still expect to marry my daughter?"

"Under these circumstances," said Tom with spirit, "I so little see my way to asking for Lilith at once, that I call Mr. Vane's bet unfair, because it was a bet on a certainty."

"It was made a good many weeks ago," observed Edward, suavely.

"I don't understand you," said Tom, coming a step nearer. "What reason had you for betting about me at all?"

"Hush!" said Mr. Turold, "don't talk of

bets now, Edward. This is too serious for bets. May I ask, Tom, if you are pursuing that rascally manager to bring him to the dock?"

"I don't think my father wishes to bring him to the dock," replied Tom; "he's a relation."

"Won't that look like conniving at his crimes?" asked Edward.

"At our own losses," corrected Tom.

"And you have only just guessed the man was a scoundrel? Other people knew it long ago. How has your house held up so long, considering——"

"We needn't go into all that, Edward," interposed Mr. Turold; "it is not our affair; nor Tom's either, for I have always understood that he is not officially in the business at all. What I wish to ask is this: will Mr. Palmer's capital or his credit hold out to set him on his legs again? Because if not —there is no use in mincing matters—my daughter cannot marry his son. I must

remind you, Tom, without being mercenary, that the difference in your social positions was condoned only on consideration of wealth."

"No, sir," said Tom, colouring highly, "I never thought so. *That* was not the consideration which justified my success with Lilith."

"Sentiment," said Edward, with a sneer.

"Put it as you like," said Mr. Turold, "if you haven't wealth to offer her, as a matter of mere common sense my daughter must learn to love elsewhere."

Tom was silent for a moment.

"You are deciding against us too hastily," he said; "matters are not hopeless. We shall have to begin again certainly, but with excellent prospects. My father's credit *will* hold out."

"You are sanguine," said Edward.

"Yes, I am sanguine. He does not intend to make the Prepared Paraffin again, but a new and a very greatly improved oil. It

must supersede every other light. He is on the eve of patenting his invention. If father is not the most astute of business men," cried Tom, "he is something better. He is an extremely clever man of science!" He turned to Edward. "You would not laugh if you had seen the new lamp. Will you and Mr. Turold come down to our house and I will show it to you? It is, without any exaggeration, a most magnificent light."

Without answering, Edward addressed his kinsman:

"If you ask my advice, I should say my cousin's hand should not be promised unconditionally; nor until this new oil, or whatever it is, has had a very complete trial. I am told there is nothing more risky than even a successful patent."

Mr. Turold fidgeted.

"You had better go to Lilith yourself, Tom, and tell her how matters stand. I consider it all very precarious."

Tom smiled, feeling great renewal of confidence when he thought of the new lamp; not even Edward Vane could sneer at that.

CHAPTER V.

LILITH, a little flushed with excitement, sat in the window-seat, waiting for her lover. He put his arm round her; but there was something troubling the girl, and she did not sink into his embrace quite so readily as of old.

"Tom, I do want to explain to you about that horrid wager. Edward likes to be teasing sometimes. I didn't make any wager, nor did he seriously. It was a joke."

"Oh, a joke, was it?" said Tom, not greatly interested; "well, tell me the joke, if it's worth laughing at."

"There is nothing to laugh at; it was very silly. It made me very cross," said Lilith,

with so much insistence that Tom began to think it must be of importance, and to recall Edward's insinuations. "He wanted a wager —in joke, of course—about the first demand you'd make when you came home. It was a long time ago, and I had been saying to papa that whatever day you wished for our wedding he must let me agree to it. Edward was listening, and he took it up and made silly jokes; and now I think it is most unkind of him to repeat it to you, as if *I* had been laughing or making bets about anything you would say or do! Indeed, Tom, I would never do such a thing!"

Lilith had not made her story very clear, and Tom perhaps thought that, like the lady in the play, she protested too much.

"Lilith, has Vane been trying to come between us?" he asked abruptly, scanning the delicate face with some anxiety.

Somehow the girl did not impress him as quite so resolute as she had been six months ago.

"It is not pretty of you to ask such a thing, Tom. Should *I* let any one come between us?" Involuntarily she put a slight emphasis on the "I."

There was a pause, Tom watching her. Lilith tried to shake off her depression and get back into the old playful vein.

"Papa has been so nice to me lately, Tom. I am sure, in his heart, he is more reconciled to it. Now you've come home, it's all right!"

"I am afraid not, Lilith," said Tom, gravely. "I'm afraid it isn't all right. We have to walk uphill awhile longer."

"Tom, I do think you and papa will be friends some day! I do indeed!"

"Mr. Turold is not unfriendly, dearest. But he says you must marry a rich man; and I am not sure that you realize, Lilith, what has happened; that my riches, in the course of the last few days, have done after their natural manner—have made themselves wings."

"But does it matter, Tom? to you and to me?"

"It matters this much, that we shall have to wait. Your father bade me tell you that very probably he would forbid it altogether."

"Oh, Tom!" said Lilith, pushing him away a little; "and what did you say?"

"I said," replied Tom, smiling, "that it wasn't my place to tell you that."

"But you have told me!"

"My darling, yes! For, after all, I hope we love each other enough to discuss even that frankly together."

"Tom, do you want to give me up?" asked Lilith, with a great effort, looking down.

"Would you have me if I were poor, Lilith?" Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, but she raised them again to his, keeping silence, however. "Darling! dearest! let us speak frankly; it's the only way. Sometimes I am not sure we have been quite frank enough with each other. Never

mind about hurting me. I am not easily hurt. Tell me exactly what you feel about it, my sweet!"

"Tom, I love you so much, I'd marry you to-morrow, if it was to live in a garret. I mean if *you* love me enough—if *you* don't want to give *me* up. But what frightens me is to think of waiting a year, or two years, or three, with papa angry again, and Edward teasing, and other people—oh, I don't really care what other people think, I shouldn't feel it in the very least if we were married—but it's the idea of always having to argue——"

"I know. It *is* disagreeable, Lilith. But are you sure you wouldn't feel it if you were married? Darling, have you thought what it would mean to be married to me without riches?"

"Yes! I know all about being poor. *We* are poor. Look, you never saw one of *your* friends in a little 11¾*d.*-a-yard dress like this. I never had fans and flowers and boxes

of sweets till you gave them to me. I could do without a horse, or visits, or travelling; and quite little, kitchen-maid dinners would do. I'd cook for you myself, Tom, and learn to make everything you liked. Oh, no! I should not mind being poor!"

"It would be a different kind of poverty, Lilith. You aren't, I know, used to turtle soup, but you are to silver spoons. Living with me in a garret, you'd have none of the consequence you have here. Some of your friends would drop you."

"Nasty things! I'd drop them! But, Tom, do you really mean me to say what I think?" she asked coaxingly.

"Why, yes, Lilith, I do."

"But it's something you once put down your foot about, and I don't want to annoy you, Tom. Poor Tom! you have worries enough without a teasing wife too!"

"If I am very much annoyed, I'll put the foot down again; but I'll try not to crush my pretty Lilith under it. Go on, darling."

"Well, then—I should be the heiress still. We could live here."

"No, Lilith, no; the foot comes down. I didn't agree to that plan when I could have brought money into the establishment. Certainly I shouldn't agree to it if I were empty-handed. Besides, our marriage, under the circumstances, would be against the wish of your father and your grandfather, and I should most assuredly not be invited here."

"You aren't angry with me, Tom, for saying it?"

"Not a bit. Only I wish you could *see* how impossible that plan is!"

Lilith thought he was a little angry, and made no reply, feeling sad.

"I was going to ask you to wait, dearest. But you say you don't like the idea of waiting indefinitely? Would it not be better, Lilith, than parting?"

"Oh, Tom, don't say it! How could I bear it? *You* don't wish that?"

"*Wish* it, Lilith?" echoed Tom, bitterly.

"And yet, oh, my darling! I should prefer it to a hasty, ill-considered marriage, which you would afterwards repent."

Lilith was a less civilized being than her lover, and had not the same power of looking ahead. The long-gathering tears filled her eyes and chased each other down her cheeks.

"But we should be happy *now*," she murmured, half intelligibly.

"Let me tell you what I think, Lilith. I think it will all come right, if we have patience. Even if waiting is rather tiresome, well, only one day comes at a time, you know. If we ended our engagement, we should both be very miserable; and, on the other hand"—Tom smiled and tried to speak lightly; but he rose and moved away, for, after all, she had put a very strong temptation before him—"on the other hand, if I carried you off at once, my treasure, which is what I'd give my right hand to be able to do, I should never dare to ask your father's forgiveness, for I should know I

had acted unreasonably. There must be honour, even among sinners."

He smiled and talked to her a little longer, reassuringly; and Lilith smiled back and appeared comforted, and was very sweet and sympathizing about poor Mr. Palmer's illness, and the deserted Louisa Howe, with her helpless children, and the little boy whom Tom had not been able to save from the fire, and all the rest of the troubles which had to her ears some human interest.

But, after they separated, gnawing doubts arose in the heart of each. Lilith's were very vaguely defined. She just felt that things had gone wrong, and that Tom seemed older and graver, and less exclusively occupied with herself, and that Edward had said he was glad to delay the marriage. Tom's alarm was better justified. Lilith was tender and fragile, fanciful and timid; all her life she had been sheltered like a hot-house plant. Might she not faint in the day of adversity?

But it was Lilith only, who just now could sit still and brood over a love story. Tom had too much to do. His sunshiny, irresponsible youth was over; he had been pitchforked into the stern drama of life, and without any very clear directions as to the part he was required to play. Nor was his sweetheart now the only object appealing to his chivalry and tenderness. A strong man had been stricken down, and it was for the son to support his weakness, to heal his wounds, and to fight his battle. No son could have ignored the call; and the relations between Mr. Palmer and this child of his adoption and his love had always been peculiarly affectionate.

By this time they were all back at Silcote Dene; and Louisa Howe and her children had arrived, and were, so Tom feared, settling down for a permanence. The fact annoyed him greatly, for it seemed to argue insensibility on the wife's part to her husband's offences; and Norah, the eldest

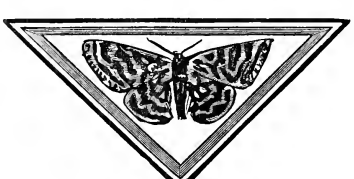
child, was a singularly unpleasant young person, to whom Lilith took a hearty dislike the moment she saw her. Norah was spoiled, forward, and vulgar; clever, too, and good-looking, which made her all the worse; and at the age of bumptious fifteen. Miss Turold came one day to ask for poor Mr. Palmer, and found herself in the room with Norah Howe, who addressed her as cousin, chaffed her about her lover, and tried to get up a flirtation with Tom to move the betrothed maiden to jealousy.

"Tom's to take me with him when he goes to see you to-morrow, Cousin Lilith," said Miss Howe, airily; "and will you show me how you do your hair? I am going to put mine up. Tom, don't you think I shall look exactly like Cousin Lilith, when my hair is up? Mine's curly and black, just like hers. But I shall be very stiff once my hair is up. You shan't ever kiss me again, Tom, after that."

Miss Turold took her departure with great stateliness.

"Tom," she said to her lover, "you mustn't dream of bringing that horrid child with you to-morrow, remember! We have visitors."

"I am not dreaming of it," said Tom, good-humouredly; but he could have wrung Norah's neck just then without compunction; Lilith had never before turned up her nose at one of his belongings.



CHAPTER VI.

THERE came a day when Tom, who had gone to town as usual, returned unexpectedly at luncheon time with a white and haggard face, and demanded to see his father at once. His manner frightened both Mrs. Palmer and Louisa, who rose hastily from their veal cutlets and stood staring at him. He passed at once into his father's room, and found the invalid leaning back in his large armchair by the fire, motionless, his eyes still bandaged, and the windows partially darkened. All Mr. Palmer's energy, all his strength, seemed to have deserted him; and the wan smile on his lips was of one who had been down into the valley of the shadow of death. Tom stood for a

moment watching him, and his own lips paled when he thought of the thing he had to say to that stricken man.

"Is it my dear boy?" said Mr. Palmer, feeling a warm hand on his shivering one. "Tom, I was wanting you. I must have sent you a mental telegram."

"Wanting me, father?" repeated the son, sadly.

Neither was in a hurry to speak, and Mr. Palmer fumbled for the tray set beside him with his luncheon. The meat was cut up as if for a child, and Tom put the fork in his hand and guided it to the plate. A few minutes passed in silence, except for encomiums on the food and wine, which were yet obviously being swallowed as a duty rather than as a pleasure.

"You see, Tom," said Mr. Palmer, rather suddenly, "I have heard a piece of bad news this morning. Oh, don't be frightened, my boy; it's nothing but what has happened to hundreds before me, and it couldn't have

come at a more merciful time—almost. I don't know why, Tom, but I had a feeling that I'd like to tell *you* first. I've a kind of dread of telling mother. She'll feel it more than me, the dear woman. Tom, you'll have to break it to her for me."

"What is it, father? What has happened?"

Tom's voice, always expressive, was startling in its sadness; and Mr. Palmer's cheerfulness faltered as he turned his sightless eyes inquiringly to his son's face.

"It was the Lord who gave," he said, "and now the Lord has taken away. I am blind, Tom! Blind. Dr. Wrench has been here this morning, and brought another man with him—a Mossoo; I couldn't catch his name. It's no use! They can't never make me see again. I am blind."

Tom was long silent, his left hand grasping Mr. Palmer's dry and trembling one, his right arm thrown round his father's shoulder as he knelt by his side.

"My boy, it's come at a merciful time. I have seen my lamp. Yes, thank God, I have finished my work; I have seen my bonnie lamp. Bless me, Tom! what's that you have dropped on my hand? Confound the lad! He's only a girl after all! Don't be thinking, Tom, I'm always going to sit helpless on a chair like this. I'll learn to go about and do everything for myself. I've no notion of giving in to things; it's sulks. It's like the men who thought they were starving, and the Lord said to them, 'How many loaves have ye? *Go and see.*' That's what he says to me, Tom: *Go and see* how much strength, and sense, and good things you have left. Ay, and He'll make it sufficient, my boy, if it's no more than the five barley loaves and the two small fishes."

Anxious to show his activity and good will, he had risen and was groping his way about the room, leaning on his son's arm. Here, however, he caught his foot in the rug and stumbled heavily.

"Never mind, never mind; it needs practice," he said, and sat down rather staggered, Tom leaning on the table beside him, and wondering how after this prelude he was to utter his own bad news, which yet must be communicated, and at once.

"I could wish you had told me this any other day, father!" he said at last.

And again Mr. Palmer, struck by his tone, turned to him abruptly and inquiringly, and tried, by his inexperienced fingers, to *feel* what he was thinking about. The son could have cried like a child.

"I have discovered," said Tom in a low voice, clenching his hands, "the exact reason why Jim has gone. God knows, father, I would keep it back from you if I dared."

"No, no, Tom; keep nothing back!" gasped Mr. Palmer, alarmed.

No one had mentioned Jim's name to him lately; he himself had felt the subject too painful to be faced till he should be stronger.

"Father," continued Tom, "you told me

you were doubtful about your agreement with Stirke and Ransom. Had you signed it?"

"Yes, Tom, I had. God forgive me! it was brought to me the very day I perfected my oil, and the details had always been left to Jim. Ransom was a friend of his, you know. Jim told me it was word for word the same as last year. Have they plundered us, Tom? It will come in awkward just now. But it's my own fault; I can't deny it. I'd sooner you blamed me than poor Jim."

"I'd give the world they had plundered us," said Tom; and went on, "I saw Stirke yesterday. I have been with him all this morning. He is anxious to be just—generous, I dare say; but the position is most serious. We must not calculate on mercy. I do not believe you would wish it, father."

Mr. Palmer trembled.

"Tom, you speak Dutch. Get on faster, boy; you forget I cannot see you," he said peevishly.

"Ransom had absconded also, but has been arrested. Howe, I hope, will be found and arrested. There has been plunder, father; good heavens, yes! enough of it; extending over a long period. It is not you who have been plundered; it is Stirke. Criminally, he says."

The sick man's face whitened, and the veins stood out on his brow. He pressed his hand heavily against his eyes; then tore the bandage from them, as if hoping thus to regain their use.

"Criminally, Tom? Who? What?"

"Criminally," repeated Tom, "certainly on Howe's part, and on Ransom's, I suppose. But—good God, father! don't ask me to say more."

Mr. Palmer was silent for a moment. Though his face was ghastly, he was regaining his quiet and his strength.

"I see, Tom; you mean that it has been done—whatever it is—in my name; that I am responsible."

"Father, they have your signature!" said Tom.

There was a pause.

"Then I *am* responsible," said the blind man, rising; "there is not a doubt about it. My boy," he went on, firmly, "I need not protest to *you* that I am innocent of dishonesty. The world will not listen to protestations, and you need not fear I shall stoop to make any. If Jim has let me in for this, my negligence has made me responsible, and I will make reparation. You must give me the figures, Tom; the whole statement of the transactions from beginning to end. And, Tom," his voice changed to piteous pleading, "you must read it out slowly, and be patient if I ask for the same bit again and again. I am blind, you know. You haven't gone away, lad, have you?" ended the blind man, irritably, as his son kept heavy silence.

The quick clasp of the firm young hand reassured him, and he was himself again. He resumed calmly.

"Tom, you are thinking I shall be arrested with the others; at once perhaps. Whether that is the case or not, unless you and I can find an adequate explanation, I shall repay this money; whatever sum it is, and without hesitation."

"Father," said the young man, in a low, distinct voice, "we have not got it to pay. We are broke."

CHAPTER VII.

"A LITTLE unremembered act of kindness" done by Jack Palmer in his dreamy youth to this same man Stirke, saved him from immediate pursuit. "I will certainly give him a chance," said Stirke to himself, with what he believed great generosity; "I'll see what the young fellow has to propose. But of course he shall be watched. He shan't decamp like his precious nephew. It's a pity these self-made men always turn out dishonest."

But Tom, ignorant of these pacificatory reflections, was in a fever of anxiety, and shook each time he heard a step on the threshold. After he had left Mr. Palmer,

and while his horse was saddling, he said a few words to his mother of explanation and warning.

She was a quiet but a strong woman, and sat with her hands folded in her lap, neither weeping nor wailing. When he told her further of the oculist's verdict, her reply moved Tom's admiration.

"I have known it from the first, dear," she said sadly. "Dr. Wrench told me the first day he had next to no hope. I kept it to myself, not to discourage poor father and you."

"You are very brave, mother," said the young man, and sat down on a low seat by her side and let her put her arms round him and comfort him.

"He has his son left to him, Tom, whatever else is gone; and if you only knew it, that's more to him than most things. And he has his lamp to think about too. And you've been a good son to us, Tom; and he's a good man, and we mustn't forget the

promise that the righteous never are forsaken. There'll be some way of help for him, I do believe; and if any one can find it, it'll be you, my dear, I am sure of that."

"Why, what in Heaven's name can *I* do?" cried Tom. "The curse of it is that my good things will leave me, and they *won't* benefit him, not one jot."

Mrs. Palmer was rather frightened.

"Will you lose *her*, Tom?" she whispered.

"Who? Lilith?" returned Tom, bitterly. "Yes, I suppose I shall lose her. However this matter ends, Mr. Turold will have to be told, and I am confident he will kick me out."

"But, Tom, wouldn't *she*——"

"How can I tell?" cried Tom. "Has she no one but me to think of? You torture me, mother, with these questions."

He burst from her, flung himself on his horse and had taken up the bridle, when penitence drove him back. His poor patient mother!

Mrs. Palmer had gone to her husband, and

thither Tom followed her, his step noiseless on the thick carpet.

"If he had only chosen Grace!" he heard his mother say, leaning over the blind man, the door behind her ajar.

Tom turned abruptly and did not carry out his intention of apology.

Some hours later he was, according to his father's wish, closeted with Sir Joseph Kidson. Dinner was finished at the substantial villa which the Molesworthy wags called Kerosine Castle; but Sir Joseph sat on over his wine, and so received his visitor in the dining-room.

"Well, Tom, this is a pretty blow up," he said, pushing the decanter across the table. "Ah, I always said your governor was spending too much money. Has he been off his head, then, this last twelvemonth? What, hasn't he heard whispers? If he hadn't the face of an innocent they'd have been more than whispers by this time; and I tell you what, if he hadn't the face of an

innocent he'd be spending to-night in a police cell. Well, what's he going to do?"

Sir Joseph's tone was not exactly pleasant, and Tom wished himself free to resent it.

"Refund the money," said Tom.

"Has he got any money?"

"I don't think he has. Father wants to see you, Sir Joseph. He says you'll advise him how to raise it."

Sir Joseph drank a glass of port and poured out another.

"Are you still engaged to that Miss Turold?" he asked.

"Of course I am engaged to Miss Turold," said Tom, angrily; "I am not come to discuss that."

"But it'll be broke off, eh?"

"Never by me," said Tom.

"It's a pity you are engaged to Miss Turold," persisted Sir Joseph. "I might have been inclined to help you if we could have made it a sort of family concern. Do you know, Tom," burst out Sir Joseph, "my girl

wants to go into a nunnery—a popish nunnery! It's a shame and a sin to think of. I'd sooner see her go into her grave. And it's all because *you* have fiddle-faddled with her and made her in love with you, and then turned her off like an old glove when you saw a smarter woman. It's next thing to a breach of promise. And here's the result: she's turned papist already, and now she's going to turn nun."

"Sir Joseph, I can't think of anything but father's position. The only way to clear himself of this is to make compensation. Stirke has been cheated abominably, and that's the plain truth; and father, now that he knows it, won't have a moment's peace of mind till the money is refunded."

"And then there's the probability of prosecution," put in Sir Joseph.

"Good heavens, I know!" cried Tom. "But he is ill, weak in mind and in body. And he has lost his eyesight, poor father! I don't suppose he'll ever be able to attend

to business again. And Jim is gone and I am as ignorant as a pig. You must give me advice, Sir Joseph. How am I to raise this sum, to say nothing of our other debts?"

"The thing is," said the other, "Jack has no security to offer."

"You are wrong there, sir. Would not the Prepared Paraffin offer security? And we have a better fish in our net. I have come to tell you."

Sir Joseph emptied his glass again.

"Prepared Paraffin is superseded," he said.

"It is, indeed!" cried Tom.

"Combined Kerosine also."

"I cannot deny it."

"You don't seem to understand me, Tom. I have just patented a new oil."

"You?" echoed Tom, with momentary dismay, quickly subsiding; for Prepared Paraffin had always excelled Combined Kerosine, and it was inconceivable that Sir Joseph's improved kerosine could approach

in glory to the improved paraffin of Mr. Palmer's invention.

"Haven't you seen my advertisement all over London? 'FROM HENCEFORTH EVENING SUNRISE.' Neat, isn't it?"

"Oh, is that yours? We thought it was soap. Why didn't you tell us, Sir Joseph?"

"I begin to sell next month," said Sir Joseph, complacently. "I've got the patent, and have been manufacturing more largely than would be prudent for a less A1 thing."

"May I see the light?" said Tom; and followed his host to the drawing-room, thinking that this rival lamp, poor thing as it would doubtless prove compared with Mr. Palmer's, had appeared most inopportunely.

Sir Joseph's house was less spacious and less magnificent than the mansion of Silcote Dene, though magnificence would have sat more becomingly on him and on his lady than on simple Mr. and Mrs. Palmer. The Kidson drawing-room was crowded in the modern style with inexpensive ornaments

and movables, and was generally pervaded by a dim religious light, dear to Grace. Tom had a horror of the room, and always expected to knock something down as he made his entry. To-night there was no excuse for such awkwardness.

"There's a blaze of Sunrise for you!" said Sir Joseph, flinging the door wide and pushing Tom Palmer in.

Afterwards the young man had only a confused recollection of having shaken hands with Lady Kidson and with Grace, of having heard and vaguely answered a few questions, of having seen Edward Vane in the background as a gracefully smiling spectator. He was thoroughly conscious of one thing only: the effulgence of the single lamp on the centre table.

Sir Joseph put his arm through Tom's and began to talk volubly.

"Mr. Vane tells me it has all been fooling between you and that Miss Turold. She's going to jilt you. Your name's to be struck

off her books to-morrow. I'll give your father a partnership, Tom, and square it somehow with Stirke, if you'll try your luck as my son-in-law," he said, holding out his disengaged hand to draw Grace forward.

Tom wrenched his arm from the man's grasp, the hot blood mounting to his brow.

"I think, Sir Joseph," he said, his voice shaking with anger, "you might have spared your daughter this."

He walked over to the lamp and stood looking at it and trying to recover from the sense of stinging insult. Again the glorious radiance burned itself into his brain. Then suddenly full realization of the calamity returned to him, and his angry flush died away, leaving him pale as ashes.

"My God!" exclaimed Tom, clenching his fists and staggering backwards as if stricken by the dazzling rays; "but it is identical! It is the same thing!"

Late that night Mrs. Palmer was in the

hall at Silcote Dene waiting for her son's return. He came in slowly, his head bowed, his hand trembling, despair in his soul. He had lost all hope now. Mr. Palmer had nothing to fall back upon; his capital, his credit were alike gone; he was ruined and dishonoured. And for Tom himself, he had lost his Lilith.

"My dear," said the quiet woman, meeting him in the doorway and taking his hand, "poor father's sitting up for you. He'll never sleep a wink till you've been to him and told him what you've done."

"Oh, mother, no!" cried the son; "I cannot tell him to-night!"

But the invalid's voice was heard calling, and they crept in together on tiptoe to the room where the blind man sat, brilliantly illuminated by his new lamp but himself insensible to its presence.

"Tom! Is that you, Tom? Come to me at once. Has Joe come? Have you devised something? Take him to the

laboratory and show him the lamp. I told mother to light it there ready for you. Is Joe in the room with you now, Tom, or is he not?"

The son knelt beside him and took the wasted hands in his.

"My dear, dear father!" he said; "my dear father!" How he got the further words out he never knew. They had the keenness of a sabre thrust, and no gentleness could avert their wound. "Father," said Tom, in a tone of anguish, "Sir Joseph is not here. He has shown no confidence in you, no consideration for you. He is not your friend. Your new lamp is valueless. It is forestalled; and by him."

"My—my lamp, Tom?" murmured the blind man, faintly.

Then for half an hour there was silence. The sufferer lay back in his chair, rigid and motionless, his face drawn and white, as if the current of his blood had frozen. But he had not fainted, and his thoughts had flown

into a region whither his son's could not follow.

"Tom," he said at last, in a soundless voice which accorded too well with his deathly aspect, "there is one comfort left to me: I don't intend any of this to fall upon *you*."

Mrs. Palmer burst into tears, wringing her hands; but the words were meaningless to Tom, and he scarcely heeded them.

They got him to bed, and all that night he lay with his sightless eyes unvisited by sleep, and with drops of silent anguish on his brow. Now and then his lips moved, but no sound passed from them; he waited as David, when he said, "I was dumb: I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." His wife had petitioned for her right to sit up with him, but very gently he had sent her away. "Let me have my boy," he said, "maybe it's for the last time." And sometimes, as the long night-watches wore away, the feeble groping hand would seek

his son's, to make sure he was beside him still.

The wintry daylight had come, and it was nearing the hour of the household's awakening, when he began to talk. His tone was eager, the paralysis of grief was over, strength had returned, and with it the wish to act. Tom was not sure the frail current of his blood was unfevered.

"In so far as this trouble's punishment," he said, "I wouldn't wish a way out. I have been wrong, Tom. I see it all now. I have been a neglecting, an unjust steward of my Master's riches. It was partly because I knew Jim was so much cleverer than me, partly that I wasn't quick enough to follow his explanations, partly that my mind was on something else. God forgive me!"

"Well," said Tom, "if you have been credulous and careless, it isn't my notion of Heaven's justice that you should be accused of swindling. But the law is indiscriminating. You must listen to me, father. Will

you and mother slip away over the sea somewhere? We should at least be spared seeing you treated as a felon. If so, if you want to escape, we must set about it at once."

"Tom," said Mr. Palmer, "if I could see your face, my lad, I should know that you neither wish nor expect me to say 'Yes' to that proposition."

Tom smiled faintly.

"You would rather face it, dad? I thought so. But are you sure you know what you are facing?"

"Yes, Tom. It's a sad end to my poor life, but I will face it." He was silent for a moment, then resumed: "What crushes me, Tom, is not losing my riches, God knows I never cared about them, except for you, my boy; nor losing my bonny lamp, though I've lived for little else this three years; nor losing my son, though he's grown to be an idol to me if too much love can be idolatry——'

"What do you mean about losing your

son?" interrupted Tom. But with that suspicion of fever, he did not press the question, and Mr. Palmer went on:

"—nor being called a fool, which maybe I was; nor a rogue, which, before heaven, I was not; but what crushes me is that God is leaving me without the means of paying my debts: ill debts, Tom, and I would any day rather have walked to my grave over burning coals than have taken a farthing from any one beyond my rights. My boy, think for me! my head is weak. Is there nothing to be done? Didn't Joe Kidson suggest anything? I'd have helped him, Tom, if he'd been in a trouble like this."

"He made one suggestion," said Tom, dryly.

"He did? And you haven't told me, Tom? What was it? Why haven't you told me?"

"He suggested," said Tom, slowly and dryly, "that I might marry Grace."

Mr. Palmer started up on his elbow with

a momentary glorious vision of the rescue and the joy implied by this.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with the triumph of one who has found a solution, "Grace loves you, Tom!" Then the bright vision faded and left him in the darkness as before. "You shall not be asked to do it, my son," he said quietly. "I forgot, for the moment, about Lilith."

"Yes," said Tom, "I want Lilith. But it is not at all likely that I shall marry her now."

Mr. Palmer beat his hand restlessly on the counterpane, his mind still dwelling on the pleasure Tom's marriage with Grace would have given him; but he only said, "You have comforted me, my boy, telling me that my old friend *did* think of me."

He was silent again after this, and at eight insisted on rising and dressing as usual, Mrs. Palmer, with red eyes, doing his seeing for him and guiding his hands. He seemed, if anything, stronger than yesterday,

though his patient smile had vanished in the gloom of some stern purpose. The household assembled for the customary family prayer; a long file of servants coming in, who had just been told by the son of the house that they were one and all to seek other situations. Mr. Palmer sat beside his wife, and she opened the shabby, old-fashioned family Bible, which told of the self-made man's early poverty and genuine humility. On its first page was entered rather lengthily the date of his marriage with Mary Hcoper; and below this was left large space for the names of many sons and daughters. Not Tom's name nor any other was written there. The boy himself had sometimes wondered at the omission.

"Not the usual chapter, Polly," said Mr. Palmer; "maybe we'll never be all together like this again. We'll have a special chapter, and Tom shall read it. He'll remember it afterwards. We'll have the tale of Abraham called by the Lord to give up his only son."

Tom saw no special application in the chapter, and read it in clear, untouched accents, his mind running on other things. But the blind man seemed strangely moved, and tears stood in his wife's kind eyes as she watched him.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the afternoon, Tom, returning from town, went first to Turold Royal. Till now he had hardly faced his own position; its wretchedness forced itself obtrusively on his notice as he paced the lime avenue of his love's stately home. Almost at the house, he turned and retraced his steps to the lodge; there turned again. What would his reception be? It seemed to him as if power of will were leaving him, and the rest of the day must pass in this miserable wandering backwards and forwards, through the thick drizzle, under the limes; his heart torn in two by the wild desire to feel Lilith in his arms and the

dread that this meeting would prove their last.

From this lethargy he was roused by an unlooked-for sight. Two figures came from the house towards him, very slowly and laboriously: one, a little girl, holding with difficulty an umbrella over her companion, and supporting no less than guiding his feeble steps. The child Tom recognized at once. It was Norah Howe: Norah, very self-important and a little careworn, but gentler and more womanly than usual. Whose, however, was that bowed and trembling form? Whose that hesitating, stumbling step? That blind, *old* man—was this indeed his father? The son hardly recognized him. And what in the world was he here for?

"Oh, Tom!" cried Norah, as he joined them, "do hold the umbrella for me! It's so heavy, and this roll of papers is so slippery, and he's getting dreadfully wet, and he *is* so tired. I can't think how ever I'll get

him home. And we've been there such a time. But Cousin Lilith was ever so nice and—— "

"Hush!" said Tom, more than ever astonished; but appalled by Mr. Palmer's aspect and this silent, terrible clinging to his son's arm. Had some new trouble fallen? But the only question he asked was a perfunctory one.

"Why didn't you drive, dad?"

Mr. Palmer stopped and gasped for breath.

"I've no right, Tom—to drive in my carriage—no more," he said; "but it's a long—way."

Tom took him home, and Norah walked unheeded on one side, hanging also on the young man's arm, and heavily, for she, too, was tired. At the hall door Mrs. Palmer met them, and Tom handed the blind man into her charge, recommending port wine at once; then was starting back to Lilith, when he found he had still the roll of papers in his hand.

"Here, Norah, take these," he said carelessly; but Mr. Palmer suddenly snatched them from the child and thrust them back at Tom with the vague direction of blindness.

"They are yours, my boy. Take them. Keep them yourself, my dear lad. They are yours."

Tom stuffed them into his pocket and disappeared into the rain again; thinking of Lilith, who, by Norah's account, was expecting him.

"I've done it, Polly!" gasped Mr. Palmer; "there's only you and me now. He'll never be called our son no more. Oh, my dear, my dear! may God forgive me for feeling it so deeply. He'll never be our son no more." And he groaned; Norah watching him with her big eyes, vastly astonished.

Silently the childless man and woman went into their desolated house and sat together in the twilight, alone and with no work to distract them from their pain.

PART VII.

DILEMMA.

CHAPTER I.

MR. PALMER had spent that morning in his laboratory, where the familiar smell of his chemicals and the touch of tubes and retorts recalled him to his old self. But he had nothing to do. Once he rose and groped about till he found a specimen of his new oil which had been such a pride and delight to him. He dabbled his fingers in it, then a wave of great disappointment overwhelmed him, and all alone the old man wept.

In the afternoon he sent for Norah, and with her help got his cabinet open, and Tom's

credentials, long treasured in secret, brought to light. It took a long time, for Norah did not know what she was seeking, nor was quick in deciphering what she found. At last, however, Mr. Palmer had all the papers in his hand, and got himself dressed by the help of the footman; and then he set out for Turold Royal, leaning on the little girl and on his umbrella. But this was the first time he had been out since his illness, and long ere reaching his destination he could scarce drag one foot after the other.

Yates went off in search of Caxton; and neither Caxton nor Yates being pleased by the visit, the blind man and the child were left long standing in the hall.

"Norah, I know the way myself," said Mr. Palmer. "Come, my dear, we'll go up the staircase."

How pleased was Norah! but how frightened too when she found herself wandering round the strange, spacious, sombre house, so unlike any she had seen

before. Mr. Palmer was soon at fault, and they strayed into a vast panelled gallery, with doors opening off it and deeply recessed windows looking out over the park. They paused, bewildered. Suits of armour were stationed at intervals divided by stately chairs and wondrous chests. Ghostly portraits in antique frames hung on the walls. At Norah's feet lay a beautiful renaissance monument of a dead warrior, his sword on his breast, his spurs at his side, his mailed hands meekly crossed; his face beneath the helmet, young, calm, and beautiful; the neck relaxed, the mouth fallen a little open, as at the touch of Death's own finger. Norah had not seen a dead man before, and even in this beautiful marble it frightened her.

"I'm quite certain we aren't going right," she said, her voice shrill with anxiety. "I'd much better call Cousin Lilith; or perhaps a housemaid," she added apprehensively, perceiving that Miss Turold must be a more stately lady than she had at all supposed.

Happily Lilith overheard the cockney accents of her aversion, and came out hastily from her boudoir, feeling surprised that after all Tom should have brought this odious child into the house. To her astonishment she saw, instead of her anxiously expected lover, poor Mr. Palmer struggling painfully along, looking hopelessly tired and ill and unhappy, his boots, victims of his blindness, splashed, like Christian's after the Slough of Despond. Lilith, who had only known him as very healthy, very prosperous, and, as she supposed, very much contented with the world and with himself, was awestruck.

"Come in here, Mr. Palmer," she said, taking his hand. "Isn't Tom with you? Come in, Norah; don't cry, dear. This is my own room, and I was having tea early because I thought Tom was coming. Oh, Mr. Palmer, nothing has happened to Tom, has it?"

"No, my dear, nothing. That's just it.

Nothing has happened to Tom," he said. "He'll be here presently, my dear. Don't you be frightened. I—I am very tired," he ended, faintly.

She placed him in her softest chair and brought him a cup of tea herself, ready to cry at seeing his helplessness; and she bent over him tenderly, guiding his fingers, till he had drunk it and seemed somewhat revived and rested, not talking to him, nor asking where he had dropped from, nor what he wanted.

"I had to come, please," stammered Norah, more than ever conscious of the difference between herself and Miss Turold, "to take care of poor uncle. He's gone blind, you know."

"Of course, dear," said Lilith. "I am very glad to see you."

However, she began to be conscious of a little embarrassment; for during the last few days she had heard many harsh things said of this poor old man, and she knew her

father would not like to find him in her boudoir.

"Did you bring me a message from Tom?" she asked shyly.

He got up, in his groping, unsteady way.

"My dear," he said, "you are truly fond of my boy?"

"Why, yes," said Lilith, smiling; "that's an old story now, Mr. Palmer."

"You'd sooner bear a bit of trouble for him than lose him, my dear?"

"I have never thought of giving him up," said Lilith, her colour going and coming. Oh! why had not Tom come *himself* about it?

"Miss Turold, my dear young lady, will you give me your hand, my dear, and take me upstairs to your grandfather."

"To my grandfather? Oh, Mr. Palmer, you know papa *doesn't* like it! He didn't like it before. And I am so anxious not to annoy papa just now, Mr. Palmer."

"My dear, it's for Tom's sake," said the

blind man, tremulously, "and if you only knew it, it's breaking my heart to have it to do. Don't you put difficulties in my way, my dear, for I'm too weak for fighting with any one."

Lilith, thus solemnly adjured, obeyed, wondering much. But she was young and hopeful. Her grandfather and Mr. Palmer had mysteriously aided her before; perhaps they were going to do it again.

Presently Miss Turold returned to Norah and entertained her very successfully for what seemed to both a preposterously lengthened period; on thorns, however, lest her father should come up and reprove her for what she had done, and all the while wondering more and more anxiously why, if Tom really loved her as of old, he did not come.

Meanwhile, Gilbert Turold, unconscious of intruders, was in the library talking to Edward Vane. The former looked worried enough, but the latter was in the condition

of well-controlled excitement which belongs to the successful conspirator.

"The crisis has come," said Mr. Turold; "we shall have trouble with Lilith."

"Ah, no. You see, Gilbert, I am in her confidence. I have gradually opened her eyes about him. She is full of doubts now. We mustn't spare him any longer in speaking to her."

"Yes, yes. I know all that. Poor Lilith!"

"You see, the fellow, to put it plainly, is such a liar."

Edward had disliked Tom Palmer heartily from the first; still, two months ago he had not meant to injure him more than by stealing Lilith. But to conspire against a man leads to hatred, and Edward hated Tom Palmer now.

"I think you exaggerate, Edward. Of course I've begun to distrust him thoroughly, yet there's something I rather like about the fellow, too."

"My dear Gilbert! I've been making inquiries. That was a swindling transaction which took him to America; happily it missed fire. I am told further swindling, which has not missed fire, is to be exposed at once. Then that boasting of an improved patent. Simply a lie. The fact is Kidson has a new patent—a thorough good one, I hear—and that old humbug Palmer, or the young one, tried to steal it; but Kidson was too sharp for them. Detectives are watching old Palmer to prevent his bolting. Good God, what an escape it all is for Lilith! But why are you so depressed, Gilbert? She *has* escaped."

"Depressed? I don't know that I am particularly depressed. Sit down, Edward. There is something else I wish to tell you. Of course if—if Lilith is released from this most unsuitable connection, I should greatly wish—— Well, that's neither here nor there," he said, interrupting himself hastily; "what I want to tell you is this: it won't do

for any one to count on Lilith's being eventually my heir. There may be changes——" Edward, smiling composedly, still pricked up his ears. "It was so evident to me from the first," continued Mr. Turold, walking about, "that young Palmer was not, and never could be, the man for Turold Royal, that I felt, even if he married my daughter, he must not be called to the position here. It was that consideration which made the marriage so peculiarly distasteful to me. You take my meaning, Edward?"

"Not altogether," said Edward.

"Up to the last month—of course, now one has begun to distrust him altogether; but before that I did not altogether dislike the fellow. And Lilith's wish necessarily had great weight with me. Only I couldn't possibly have him at Turold Royal; that was the point. She had to choose between her lover and her inheritance. It came to that."

"You mean——" said Edward, gently.

"I admit that I have acted a little impulsively, perhaps a little prematurely. One gets hurried on sometimes. I fear Lilith will be vexed. Young girls are sentimental; and if, after all, it turns out to have been unnecessary—I mean from her point of view. Well! well! It has not been announced, Edward. Mrs. Gascoigne does not consider the time since her husband's death sufficient——"

"You mean," said Edward, "that you are engaged to young Mrs. Gascoigne?"

"Yes; the fact is that," admitted Mr. Turold, blushing.

"It is what we have all expected," said Edward, warmly.

"Have you? Have you really?" said the elderly lover, with some excitement. "Eh? You don't think it will be considered unsuitable? Emily is certainly young, but —you have been expecting it, eh?"

"If you will allow me to say so," said

Edward, "I should think the match in every way suitable. You know, of course, that this information cannot make any obstacle to my attachment to Lilith?"

"You relieve my mind very greatly by saying that," said Mr. Turold; and they shook hands warmly. Edward, no doubt, meant what he said, for he *was* attached to Lilith altogether apart from her heirship. Still, he felt no enthusiasm for, and had even some notion of hindering Gilbert's union with young Mrs. Gascoigne.

"If I were you," said Edward, "I'd just mention what you have told me to young Palmer. I never was a believer in *his* disinterestedness. If you don't want him to suggest an elopement to Lilith, you should inform him that she has no fortune now and is very unlikely ever to have any."

"Upon my soul, Edward, I never thought Tom cared for her position. What annoyed me about him more than anything was his supreme indifference to it. To suggest now

that his motives were interested would be a gratuitous hurting of his feelings."

"Oh, never mind *his* feelings; I want to guard Lilith's. Unless we absolutely and entirely get rid of this fellow, he will have it in his power to cause her very great annoyance. The fact is, Gilbert, your kind heart has allowed the young humbug completely to take you in."

"Well, I can add a postscript to my letter. Tom is to come here this afternoon, and I was writing a letter to be given him before he sees Lilith. It is easier to write than to speak with decision. As you say, we must dismiss him, and finally." He took up his pen and added a few lines to the letter which lay on his desk ready addressed. "But I must recopy it," he said. "I believe, in my anxiety to be decided, I have expressed myself with too great severity. I really don't wish, Edward, needlessly to offend him."

"But, Gilbert, for Heaven's sake do offend him! This kindness is entirely misplaced.

Think what he is. A fellow carrying on with two women at once! I told you of the scene I witnessed between him and the Kidsons? marriage with Miss Kidson openly discussed! He's an adventurer, an impostor, out of a nest of impostors. Let me read your letter. Why, it is admirable. It is by far the safest plan to let the fellow know——"

He was interrupted. A hasty summons had come to Mr. Turold to attend his father, who had been seized by a fit; and he hurried away, asking Edward to seal the letter and ensure its delivery. Edward took a pen, underlined one or two words, and even altered a few; then committed the letter to Yates and left the house.

"I won't show in the business," he said, "but after that letter we shall certainly have done with Mr. Tom Palmer."

CHAPTER II.

TOM, after his many delays, arrived at last, and was met by Yates with the letter. He read it in the hall, with gathering astonishment and indignation. There was that in it which seemed to him not merely cruel but insolent, and insolence from Gilbert Turold was totally unexpected.

For a moment Tom stood uncertain what to do. Then he found Lilith herself by his side. For the first time he neither kissed nor greeted her, he was too angry.

"Oh, Tom, how late you are!" murmured Lilith, concealing her disappointment under pretended petulance; "and I've been staying in the whole day for you! Come upstairs."

"Your father says I am not to speak to

you, Lilith," said Tom, looking down at her with lowering eyes. The resentment roused by the letter got into his voice and aspect, making Lilith's heart beat with anxiety. "I don't choose to obey him," continued Tom; "I have a right to bid you good-bye."

"Good-bye?" repeated Lilith, vaguely, as if unable to understand the words. But his tone hurt her, and she drew herself up straight and made no further reply.

Tom folded his arms and stood watching her with gleams of wrath in his eyes.

"Lilith, Mr. Turold says I have deceived you. Well, hear the truth now. I am come here to-day to announce it. My father is bankrupt and I am penniless. In addition, there will probably be law proceedings of a very painful nature. I shall have to work for the rest of my life, not for wealth but for a subsistence, and I shall have to support my father and mother, for he is blind and old and will never work again. You and I cannot marry, Lilith. We must part."

"Tom, I said I would live with you in a garret!" said Lilith, quivering.

"I have not the garret to offer you. I have nothing."

"Tom, you speak as if you didn't *care!*" murmured the girl.

"Don't I care?" said Tom, smiling bitterly.

Lilith flung herself on the straight-backed settle near the fireplace and buried her face in the embroidered cushion.

"They have *all* been *telling* me," she sobbed, "again and again, that you went away because you were tired of *me*. Sometimes I thought it was true. You've never been a bit the same since you came back, Tom. How am I to know if people speak the truth or not? How can I be sure I am not silly in thinking you can love more truly than other men?"

"I was afraid of this, Lilith," said Tom; "some one has come between us. Well, it's all for the best, I suppose. Let us part."

"Oh no, Tom!" cried the girl, wildly,

"you don't *understand.* You think it's because of the money. I would never give you up for that! never! Oh, Tom, *do* you love me?"

"I shall love you all my life, Lilith," said Tom, with white lips.

They were interrupted, in their turn, by Caxton, who hurried in, looking scared.

"Miss, your grandpa is asking for you. He's been took very bad indeed, miss. He wants you too, sir."

The girl sat up to listen to this, and to try and understand what it all meant.

"Lilith," said Tom, "I don't feel fit to see Mr. Turold, and your father will not wish it. I will bid you good night."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Caxton, "Mr. Gilbert Turold is upstairs with my master. He's been took very ill indeed, sir, and seems as if something had excited him. He's sent for Mr. Wilkinson, and says he's going to alter his will!" ended the valet, betrayed into speech by curiosity.

Lilith jumped up.

"Oh, come, Tom! Do come!" she cried. "Grandpapa has some plan for us, I am sure of it."

"No, Lilith. He wishes to tell us all is ended. I will come, if you wish it, but I don't see the use."

"I do wish it," said Lilith. "Come!"

Holding his hand she led him quickly along the gallery and up the stair to her grandfather's apartments. Outside the heavy door, she paused and looked up at her lover, her face pale with distress. The momentary exhilaration was over.

"I wish I could be quite sure, Tom, that you have not changed to me," she murmured.

"Is there much use in going into it now?" said Tom, wearily. "You pain me very much, Lilith. Have I ever doubted your love to me?"

They entered the sick-room.

The old man lay on the sofa, his head

propped, his legs and arms stretched out motionless, great purple circles round his eyes and lips. Lilith thought he was dead, till a long, labouring sigh shook his withered frame and distended his nostrils. Beside him stood his son, erect, and not, it seemed, particularly affected or particularly tender. The granddaughter advanced on tiptoe and Tom remained at the door, his back to it, his arms folded, and stormy signs on his usually pleasant face. Gilbert Turold did not give him a glance; any favour he had retained for Tom had been effectually extinguished now by his father's extraordinary expressions.

"Is Wilkinson come?" asked the old man, without moving.

"He cannot be here, sir, for at least another half-hour," replied the son.

"*I* am here, grandpapa dear," said Lilith's coaxing voice, but provoked no response.

There was a short silence, broken by the servant's attempted return with a foot-

warmer, which Tom took from him after a short, low-toned altercation.

"Do you wish Caxton to be here or not?" asked Tom, coldly, stopping the intruder's advance.

Gilbert Turold had already sent Caxton away three times, and he turned round angrily; but before he could speak the old man had started to a sitting posture, his dying eyes awakened, and still keenly intelligent.

"Is that the boy's voice? Come here at once! Come here," he said imperiously.

Tom advanced, much against his wish, and Gilbert shut the door in Caxton's face and locked it.

"Has Palmer given you the papers?" asked the dying man, snatching at Tom's arm with the clutch of one seizing his last hope.

"What papers, sir? Yes, I believe my father did hand me some papers." He drew them from his pocket. "Are these they? I have not looked at them."

"Then put them in the fire."

So imperious was his tone that Tom was on the point of automatically obeying. He drew back, however. Gilbert impetuously put out his hand to take the documents, but the old man started up again, quivering all over and still grasping Tom's arm.

"Don't give them to Gilbert," he said. "Put them in the fire, boy, as I bid you."

"Are they yours, sir, or my father's?" asked Tom, and began slowly to unfasten the string.

"Don't—don't open them!" roared the old man, so loud that Lilith seized her father's arm in terror. "Here, give them to me."

Tom replaced the papers in his pocket and drew back.

"I remember now," he explained; "father said they belonged to me. I will look them over and speak to you again."

The old man relaxed his grasp and sank back on his pillows, tears of weakness and

defeat raining piteously from his eyes. He called Tom to him again.

"I'll make it up to you," he said feebly. "I have sent for Wilkinson. I'll alter my will, and leave you enough to marry the girl. You'll get everything with her in the end."

"I don't understand you," said Tom.

"Sir, this is unbearable!" interposed Gilbert, greatly incensed. "Mr. Palmer need not expect to get everything, nor Lilith either. I must inform you that I am myself engaged to be married; and my wife —at present Mrs. Gascoigne—I say my wife shall give me a son. This pittance you are to marry on, Mr. Palmer, will be all you shall have out of Turold Royal."

"And now," said Tom, still sore after the insulting letter, "you think you have proved me equally mercenary whether I marry your daughter or whether I do not."

"Papa!" exclaimed Lilith, in reproachful astonishment. "*You* are going to marry?

and Emily Gascoigne, who is only a girl, and who has not been a widow for even a year!"

They had withdrawn their attention from the old man, and now were startled by a long, gasping moan, followed by another short, sharp convulsion, which left him stiller and more death-like in appearance than before. He was still conscious, however; painfully so. His restless eye moved from his son to Tom Palmer and back again. Then he spoke with extraordinary energy and composure.

"It is time for me to die when you can all thwart me as if I were a fool. It is you, Gilbert, who are the fool, and you shall know it to-morrow, you and your Gascoigne."

He quite easily raised his hand, which they had thought eternally stiffened, and rubbed his forehead.

"I hear Caxton at the door," he said, "and Wilkinson is with him. Admit them."

"You feel better, dearest grandpapa?"

said Lilith, creeping to his side and kissing his hand.

"Yes, my dear, I feel extremely well at this moment. It is a sign of approaching dissolution, 'which their keepers call a lightning before death,' eh? Oh, I can quote. I was fond of the poets once. Take your father away, Lilith; and you, Wilkinson, come here."

His head rolled back suddenly, and again he made an ineffectual clutch at Tom Palmer.

"Don't let him leave the house. Let him stay within call, Gilbert!" he gasped, his lips twitching convulsively.

CHAPTER III.

GILBERT TUROLD, now thoroughly exasperated, drove Tom before him to the library, saying nothing till he had shut the door.

"Listen to me," he began, in a quick, harsh tone, quite unlike his usual one, "whatever alteration my father makes in his will, I shall dispute it in a court of justice. He is imbecile, and you have used improper influence——"

"I have not," said Tom, looking the angry man straight in the eyes.

"You contradict me, sir?" cried Mr. Turold.

"Yes. I won't endure any further slanders and insults. Here is your letter," said Tom,

tossing it scornfully to him. "Take it back before I read it again, or I shall quarrel with Lilith's father—here, in this house. I will not submit to being called a cheat and a liar."

Mr. Turold had an uncomfortable feeling that the letter had been too strong, and he put it in his pocket. Still he showed fight.

"To mention only one thing," he said, "you have been openly discussing marriage with that man Kidson's daughter. Perhaps you are not aware that Edward Vane was present, at least on one occasion, and that he is as jealous for Miss Turold as if he was her brother? I have no objection to your marrying the young woman: it would be a very prudent proceeding; but you must take yourself off out of my house."

"I have had nothing to do with Miss Kidson," said Tom. "If Mr. Vane has told you I have, he has lied."

"Oh, if you put your word against Edward Vane's, you must expect me to take

his. I have every reason for trusting him; no reason that I know of for trusting you. Your engagement to my daughter is ended. I request you to leave my house."

"No, sir. It was Mr. Turold's order that I should remain."

Tom changed his manner a little.

"Had I not better," he said, "examine these papers in case he alludes to them again? I have no idea what they can be."

Mr. Turold looked at him for a moment with wrathful eyes, then marched out, and left the intruder in possession of the library. The mysterious papers might be of some consequence; and he wanted to read over his own letter to Tom. In the hall, he took it from his pocket and his ears grew rather hot as he perused it.

"Upon my soul," he said, "I wish Edward had let me rewrite it. I had no notion I had said so much. I declare I shall have to apologize."

Suddenly he stepped nearer to the lamp and looked at the words more narrowly.

"Why, good God!" he exclaimed aloud, "the man is the meanest of villains! Why, he's a forger. He has deliberately changed what I wrote. Inserted and altered words! Edward's opinion of his character is amply justified. It's the most rascally action I ever even heard of!"

Left alone, Tom did not at once open the roll of papers. He walked up and down the room, feeling indignant and wounded to the quick, half inclined to leave the house shaking off its dust from his feet. Mr. Turold thought him a liar, and Lilith, his own sweet Lilith, had doubted his love. What place was left for him for a single moment at Turold Royal? At last, however, he grew a little calmer, and sat down to the manuscripts, glancing listlessly at the first he opened.

"Stephen Turold? They are Turold documents then? Why have they been

given to me? I wonder if father hasn't blundered and handed me the wrong ones?"

Still listless, Tom turned over the papers one by one, reading a word or two here and there. Suddenly his interest took fire, and a hot flush mounted on his cheek.

"My God!" he exclaimed, dropping the paper from his hand.

Then he sat down by the table, burying his head in his hands, and read every word in each of the documents; not once or twice, but again, and again, and again.

Tom was still absorbed in his task when the door opened timidly, and Lilith looked in. He did not raise his head, and the girl, who had been crying, hesitated before advancing.

"You are here still, Tom? Are you very busy? May I sit with you, Tom dear?"

He rose absently to get her a chair; then stood looking at her.

"I—I am not ready to finish our talk

yet, Lilith," he said, with a vague desire to stave off something, he hardly knew what.

Without thinking, Lilith stooped to pick up one of the papers which had fallen, but Tom hastily snatched it up and pushed it and the rest away from her. Lilith, a little offended, moved towards the fireplace, and, leaning against the high mantelpiece, stood there like a drooping flower.

"I have learned something," began Tom, awkwardly, "which may make a great difference—change everything."

"So have I learned something," sighed the girl.

"You? Why should you have been told anything about it?"

"Oh, Tom, do say it isn't *true!*" murmured poor Lilith.

"It seems as if anything might be true," said Tom, bitterly.

"I can't believe it, Tom. It breaks my heart."

"Then I think, I hope, we aren't talking

of the same thing. It is important. Good heavens! yes. But your heart isn't made of very strong stuff if this kind of business could break it. What have you been told, Lilith?" asked Tom, still watching her sadly. His tone sounded cold and bitter to the sorrowing girl.

"Things about you, Tom. They can't be true. I said they couldn't be true. If you had seen some one else, Tom, if you did want to marry some one else—it's quite likely, I know; there are many people nicer than I, I know that. But oh! you would have come and told me, wouldn't you? You would never behind my back——"

"Go on," said Tom, his pale face a shade paler as he sat down on the edge of the table, his arms folded. "This is what you have been told, then? You defended me, did you? Yet I think you half believe it, Lilith!"

"Oh, Tom, do you love me, or do you not?"

"If you do not believe me when I say Yes, what more can I urge?"

"But you don't *act* as if you loved me!" cried Lilith. "You are quite different from what you were. You are wrapped up in other things; you keep secrets from me. You don't take me in your arms and kiss me, as you did."

"If I am not to marry you, Lilith, I daren't kiss you as I did. Can't you understand that?"

"Then you don't want to marry me, Tom?"

"It is not a question whether I want to marry you, but whether I can marry you."

"Grandpapa said he would help us."

"I would rather break stones in the road than accept that kind of help."

"Oh, Tom! why?"

"Why? I should have thought you would see, Lilith. I am not a pauper, to live on other people. However, all that is changed; we needn't go into it."

He rolled up the papers and put them away, taking a step or two up and down the room.

"That was no *bonâ fide* kindness on your grandfather's part, Lilith," he said angrily; "it was part of a plot. Whatever happens, you may be quite sure I will not be bribed or bought off."

"Bribed? Bought off?" repeated Lilith, drearily; "I don't understand, quite. Then you think we must really give it up? Is it because of the money, Tom? Is that *all?*"

"No, it isn't all!" cried Tom; "I would to God it were all! Things seemed difficult enough this morning; they are a hundred times more difficult now."

"Papa told me," said Lilith, sitting down and lifting Tamburlaine's forepaws on to her lap, so that she could bend over his smooth head and seem to be whispering to him, "that I was standing in your way now; that without me, you could marry a rich

woman — Grace Kidson — and pay your father's debts."

"My father's debts! Yes. Good God, Lilith, if you knew all that was involved! I may have to do it," cried Tom.

The girl wept.

"Very well, Tom. Indeed, I don't want to stand in your way. Indeed, indeed, I don't." Then jealousy overpowered this magnanimity. "You shouldn't have made love to her behind my back, Tom, and while you were still engaged to me!"

Tom's eye flashed.

"Stand up, Lilith, and answer me. Who told you I had done so?"

She did not move or turn round, and Tom came to her side angrily.

"Answer me, Lilith."

"Papa has been telling me now."

"It is intolerable that your father should have done so, after I had denied it to him."

"He told me you denied it; but he said

Edward had told him, and that he had been present when you did it."

"Then I shall horsewhip Edward Vane. He has lied. I have been guilty of no treachery, Lilith; not for a moment."

"Of course I believe you, Tom," said Lilith, gently, but with dignity.

"How long will you believe me?" cried Tom. "Till Edward Vane speaks to you next?" His tone, and still more his aspect, frightened Lilith.

"You don't speak to me *kindly*, Tom," murmured the poor girl, yearning for the familiar, caressing tenderness.

To the young man, whose heart was on fire, torn and lacerated by conflicting emotions; who was furious with fate and wroth with those he loved, hopelessly perplexed by the condition of affairs, and dreading inevitable calamity, and at his hands, for his friends; Lilith's words sounded childish, and he stamped his foot impatiently and turned away.

The door opened, and Mr. Wilkinson, the lawyer, glided in, his countenance expressing preternatural solemnity. He advanced to the hearthrug between the two young people, but without taking any notice of the Princess Royal.

"I have come to inform you, sir, that Mr. Turold is dead. I have a message to you also from Mr. Gilbert. In consequence, no doubt, of some misunderstanding, he is anxious that you should not wait to see him again; should, as he expressed it, 'quit the house' without further delay. I believe, sir, you have the right to consult your own wishes, notwithstanding that message."

Tom flushed, and made no reply.

"Tom," broke in Lilith, with agitation, "there is no use in annoying papa, and everything is upset and horrid to-day. Come back early to-morrow, *please* Tom. Oh, please do! Won't you?"

"My dear young lady——" began the lawyer, pityingly.

But Tom checked him.

"Pray say nothing to Miss Turold yet, nor to any one. I must get more information—make inquiries——"

"Of course. But I believe there is no doubt. Will you permit me to look at those papers?"

Tom handed them to him in silence.

"You are aware, sir, of the importance of these documents," said Mr. Wilkinson, when he returned them. "As two of the principal witnesses are dead, your case could hardly be proved without them. May I ask what you propose to do?"

"Nothing for a day or two," answered Tom.

"The matter will be known when the will is read; Mr. Turold has added a statement. His son's announcement of his proposed marriage had put the old man into a frenzy. For the last year his course has been a senile, a most mistaken one, but he had no wish to do positive injustice."

"Perhaps not," said Tom, coldly.

"I think, if you will allow me to advise, it will be hardly fair to let the news come as a shock to Mr. Gilbert. Will you not authorize me to inform him at once?"

"Very well," said Tom, his eye resting on Lilith; "Miss Turold, too, if she wishes it." Then he went to her side, penitent for his harshness. "Good-bye, dearest. I must get home now."

In the presence of the stranger their farewell could be but restrained.

"Oh, Tom, you *will* see me again?" whispered Lilith, holding his hand.

"Yes! yes!" said Tom, with warmth; "of course we must see each other again!"

Lilith could have cried for joy at the kinder tone. "He *does* love me!" she said to herself, "it *is* only the money!"

Tom made his way out of the house, passing Mr. Turold in the hall, but without remark. It was nine o'clock, and he guessed how anxiously he was expected at Silcote

Dene. Still he did not go there at once. He wandered away through the park and the woods, losing himself in the thickets and frightening the deer. The evening was wild and disagreeable, with fitful moonlight and deep shadows and glooms. Across the sky a rack of clouds was fleeting madly, and an occasional star sent its cold beams through the shifting veil. The trees rocked and sighed in the blast which was tearing away their last poor leaves. No one else was about, and Tom threw himself on the ground in the darkness, and covered his face with his hands and tried to think. "If Lilith trusted me, I could bear anything," he said to himself; "but she does not trust me. Oh, my darling, my darling! what must I do?"

After a time the wind fell a little, and a heavy soaking rain came on. Yet he sat there on the wet leaves, his eyes absently fixed on the distant, scarcely visible sward before the Court and the low gabled and

mullioned house, where Lilith was at this moment, he hoped, sleeping peacefully after the sorrows of the day. "If father had told me this a year ago," he said, "I should have been with her now." With that thought of the fair, sleeping Lilith as he might have seen her, trustful, sympathetic, and his very own, a sting of self-pity threatened to disable him; and he rose impatiently and waked himself up from what had become mere dreaming.

He had *not* been told the truth a year ago. Lilith was *not* his, and did not understand him; and four courses were open to him now, and four only, and not one of the four could be adopted without grief, disappointment, and possible shame falling on the innocent head of some person who was very dear to him. Which course was he to choose?

Depressed, miserable, enervated; soaked by the rain, and shivering with cold, it was impossible to come to a decision to-night.

Suffering for his mere self seemed little; but deliberately with his own hand to take a knife and plunge it into the breast of one he loved!—for to-night at least he wanted the courage. "If Lilith trusted me," he repeated, "I could bear anything. Oh, my darling, my darling! what am I to do?"

But at last he did arrive at one resolution. Of the four courses one he was able to reject, and with a decision that admitted no re-opening with himself of that point. "I will not marry Grace Kidson," he said; "I love Lilith."

Then he went home; his step firmer, now that he had at least decided this much.

It was late, and the household had gone to bed; but he found supper laid out for him in the dining-room, and when he was creeping on tiptoe to his own apartments, a voice called him from Mr. Palmer's dressing-room, and he went in, to find the blind man and his

wife with wan faces waiting hand-in-hand by the dying fire for his coming.

They had sat up for him, though they told each other he would stay at Turold Royal; and they had heard the door, almost the clatter of his fork in the dining-room, and then his cautious tread on the thick pile of the stair-carpet.

At sight of him poor weary Mrs. Palmer, who had perhaps more sense of guilt in the matter than had her more fantastically minded husband, broke down completely, and began to cry. His right hand in hers, Tom knelt by the blind man's side, and felt the shaking fingers, vainly trying to do duty for eyes, pass over his brow. There was a short silence, for the young man was too much moved to attempt a word.

"Tom, my dear, dear boy, what have you to say to me? God knows that from beginning to end I would not have harmed a hair of your head. Speak to me, my dear, dear boy."

"Father——" began Tom; but his voice failed him and he could get no further. The one word was enough. The blind, dishonoured man, the weeping woman, had still their son.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU have sent that young fellow off for me?" said Gilbert Turold. "Thank you, Mr. Wilkinson. I did not feel equal to meeting him again. I have been greatly deceived in that young man. He has behaved very badly, and my daughter has had a very narrow escape. Well, I hope my poor father did not attempt any insane alteration of his will? If there is anything of the kind, I intend to dispute it."

"Mr. Turold had no time to alter anything. There is, as you have been told, practically no provision for any one but the heir-at-law. I wish he had had time to make some alteration."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Wilkinson.

Do you imagine that my daughter's interests are not safe in my hands? It is the greatest possible relief to me to learn he did nothing."

"I did not say that. Mr. Turold made an important statement, which is appended to his will. I cannot encourage you to hope for any success in challenging it, sir."

Mr. Turold made up the fire noisily into a huge furnace, and drank an enormous glass of cold water. He looked upset by the events of the day, and Mr. Wilkinson, who was never upset by anything, felt sorry for him.

"Well, what's it about?" asked Gilbert Turold, irritably.

"Your brother Stephen died when you were a young lad just going to the university?" began the lawyer.

"My brother Stephen was not one of our family ornaments, Mr. Wilkinson. Is it necessary to allude to him now?"

"Did you ever hear that he had married?"

"No; he died—killed himself, I believe—unmarried."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Turold. The fact was reported, vaguely, to your father and to your eldest brother; and was known to one or two persons as an indisputable fact."

"Good heavens! To some low, designing woman, I suppose? A detestable thing to occur in a family like ours!"

He remembered Edward Vane's history with keen annoyance; and was silent for a minute, making another needless attack on the fire.

"There are certainly circumstances in which one must pardon, or rather forget, a *mésalliance.* It generally brings its own punishment, and always causes trouble, direct or indirect; but I don't suppose a childless marriage was the most discreditable incident in my brother's career, and it seems rather late in the day to blame him for it now. Let it be. If the wretched widow has turned up, we will make a suitable provision for her,

and induce her to persevere in her very prudent reticence."

"The woman died before her husband. Your father had not then convinced himself that she was your brother's legal wife, and he believed her, as you say, childless. A year ago it came to his knowledge that he had made two mistakes: Stephen was her husband; and they left a son."

Mr. Turold, who for several minutes had been feeling very uncomfortable, started from his chair with blanched countenance.

"A son! But not alive now?"

"Alive now. A very fine, handsome young man."

"God in heaven! Come now, Wilkinson, I don't believe it. It's absurd; incredible on the face of it. It's a conspiracy."

Mr. Wilkinson was silent.

"It's impossible," repeated Mr. Turold; "it's a conspiracy."

"I fear your position is serious, sir," said the lawyer.

"It would be so, certainly, if the thing were credible. But they won't find me so easy to convince as the old man with his shaken wits. It's a conspiracy. Where is this boy to be found? Who is he? A crossing-sweeper?"

"I expected you to guess, Mr. Turold. You know him very well; fortunately. It is young Mr. Palmer."

"God in heaven!" ejaculated Mr. Turold, again. "But how can it be? It won't hold water for a moment! Why, we know all about him. He's provided with parents already, and of no very respectable sort either! It's absolute nonsense."

"Mrs. Stephen Turold was Mr. Palmer's sister. He adopted the boy. I'm afraid the facts are indisputable."

Mr. Turold turned his back on the lawyer and maintained a long silence; Wilkinson could hear his teeth chattering. At last he faced round again, and seemed calmer.

"If you had told me this a year ago," he said, "you might have taken me in. The young man, the whole family were plausible, but by this time their character has happily been exposed. They are mere adventurers of the worst type: swindlers. The old man is bankrupt, and has been robbing people right and left. He'll be in prison before a week's out. As to the young fellow, he has treated my daughter abominably, and this very day I have myself caught him actually altering words to suit his book in a letter which I had written. It's a minor matter, but it shows the sort of unscrupulous person we have to deal with. No, no; it's a conspiracy. I always wondered what brought them here. I see now: it was with the intention of hatching this plot. Possibly he is Stephen's son. I doubt it; but, at any rate, he isn't his legitimate son. If he were, we should have heard of him before. And, instead of coming in at the backdoor and trying to steal my daughter, he would

have appeared in his own person and boldly claimed his place as the nearest heir."

"He does so now."

"Oh, nonsense! The whole thing is a palpable fraud. The course has been too crooked. The man is a scoundrel, and luckily I have found it out in time. For my part, I can think of nothing but my poor girl's providential escape. Now, do you believe for a minute, Wilkinson, that he would have saddled himself with her, if he had not felt his prospect of otherwise securing the place extremely shaky?"

"Possibly an inclination——" began the prim old bachelor; but the angry man interrupted:

"Oh, pooh! We have quite ceased to believe he cares about her. If he's in love at all, it's with that Miss Kidson. There's an unconcealed connection between the two. My poor dear child! What an escape it is for her, to be sure!"

Mr. Wilkinson rose.

"I fancy, sir, when you have looked into the matter you will modify some of these views; you have not seen the young man's documents. I trust he is not what you think him. Good night, Mr. Turold."

"Good night," said Gilbert, ungraciously.

He heard the door shut with relief, and then sat down to face the matter without spectator or interruption. It must be confessed that the moment there was no one by with an opinion to be combated, the thing looked more possible. He knew very well that Mr. Wilkinson was no fool and no enemy; and the fact that he seemed convinced was not to be disregarded. Documents! That word had an ugly sound. And the young man's appearance, so unlike old Palmer's, must mean something.

"Not that I intend to believe it unless I am forced to," said Gilbert Turold to himself; "and, in any case, it doesn't alter the fellow's character. If he knew it for a

fact all along, then he is more deceitful and crooked than even Edward suspected; if he did not, his conduct in the character of Palmer's son remains what it was. Whether this is a conspiracy or whether it is not, he is a low-born, ill-bred, cunning and treacherous liar. I don't care whether he is Palmer's son, or Stephen's. There was nothing to choose between Stephen and this Palmer. Stephen was a man it freezes my blood to think of. I'd no more have associated, or have let my daughter associate, with him or his family than I would with any other scoundrel in prison or out. If the man is proved to be Stephen's son, I cut his acquaintance, that's all, as I should have cut Stephen's. It's outrageous, simply outrageous, to think of Turold Royal falling into the hands of a man of that parentage and of that character. I shall emigrate and take Lilith with me. But first I shall dispute it. I shall certainly dispute it. Stephen's son! I wonder if it can possibly be true?"

So his thoughts rambled as he sat with his considering cap on and exasperation triumphant in his breast. At last the great fire he had made died down into mere grey ashes, and he snatched up a candle and went to bed.

"There's one fortunate thing," he said. "Mr. Tom Palmer and I had reached a quarrel before this came out. I had written that severe letter—not one whit too severe either—and he had tampered with it. He can't pretend to be a gentleman after that; and if he asks for my hand as my nephew, I've a better ground for refusing it than merely because he is Stephen's son."

Passing his daughter's door, he paused for a moment, hearing a stifled sob. "It's very odd," he said to himself, still fuming, "how a death makes women cry. What reason had Lilith to care much about her grandfather?" Then he rubbed his forehead impatiently. "My poor little princess! This is a different future for her than what we

had imagined. So she's to be robbed of all her treasures, is she?"

After which came the inevitable reflection that, perhaps, after all, it was a pity her engagement to Tom *was* broken off. But he scorned to entertain that thought for more than a moment. "No, no," he said; "at any rate, *we* won't be mercenary. Lilith shall not marry a scoundrel, or the son of a scoundrel, even to retain her place at Turold Royal. I will write to Edward. *He* shall marry her, and she shall take his name. Her own has lost all interest. I declare I'd give it up myself."

By this time he was walking up and down in his bedroom, his candle still in his hand, and the wax falling about over his clothes. Suddenly he stopped short, with a sensation of giddiness and of falling over a precipice and being dashed to atoms.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "I had forgotten Emily Gascoigne. What, in the devil's name, am I to do about her?"

CHAPTER V.

THE next day passed, and no one made any sign.

Tom had awakened in the morning and found himself, so to speak, "somebody else." No doubt he, like many another, had sometimes lazily wished he might have that queer experience. Now that it was actually his, there was nothing very agreeable about it. On the whole, what surprised him most was that he was so little sensible of any difference. He felt no closer to Lilith Turold, the Princess; no farther from John Palmer, the seller of paraffin.

If he were inclined to blame Mr. Palmer's long silence—for Tom was himself disposed to straightforwardness — he none the less

thoroughly understood the man's nature, and blamed him less than he would have blamed any one else. He knew perfectly that the mistaken course had been begun and persevered in out of pure affection, and with a view to the entire welfare of the adopted son; not for worlds would Tom have expressed reproach; not for a moment did he think of renouncing his position as John Palmer's son.

"I want no other father," he said simply, his hand on the blind man's arm; "certainly not Stephen Turold. A fact is a fact, no doubt; but this is a disagreeable one, and I should like to forget it. Another and a pleasanter fact is that you have been a father to me, and I mean to remember that. You have not got rid of me, dad!" said Tom; "and if you make any change in our relation, I shall be offended. Why didn't you tell me before? You were able to regard me as your son, though I wasn't your son; couldn't I have regarded you as my father,

though you weren't my father? At any rate, I can do it now."

Mr. Palmer shook his head sadly.

"No, Tom, no. So long as I thought it was for your good, I kept you. But it ain't for your good now, and you'll be right and natural to go. God bless you, Tom. You and me have been happy together, and, maybe, in our two hearts we'll never think of each other different from what we have done. But you must leave me now. It's the Lord's will; and God bless you now and for ever, my dear lad, and watch between thee and me when we are parted the one from the other."

Tom said no more; but he went to town as usual on Mr. Palmer's business, and in the evening came straight to Silcote Dene, and no one observed any change in him from what he had been the day before. All the while his mind was still shaken by storms and contrary blasts. There were four possible courses: which was he to take?

One he had rejected almost immediately: false to Lilith he could not be. But neither could he be false to the man who had made him his son; so that the second course was rejected also. So far he had made up his mind. Two courses remained, and between these he was still undecided. Was he to save his father; or only to sink and to suffer with him? He sighed; neither course was likely to win him his Lilith; it seemed but too probable that one of them might raise between her and him a for-ever impassable barrier.

Meanwhile, the church bell was tolling, and all the blinds at the Court were down. Gilbert Turold was making arrangements for the funeral, in everything assuming his anticipated position as head of the family. At breakfast, after a long and gloomy silence, he suddenly asked his daughter if she had ordered suitable mourning for herself.

"There will be many people here," he

said; "and you will take your place as hostess, my dear. Probably for the last time."

Lilith understood this to refer to Mrs. Gascoigne. Not a word had the girl said to her father about his approaching nuptials, partly because of the great aversion she felt to the subject, more because of the trouble between herself and Tom, which had left no room for other considerations at all. But now on that subject she felt calmer; for Tom was altogether mistaken in supposing that Lilith had lost faith in him, or was unready for the promptest reconciliation. No doubt Edward, and still more her father, had made an impression; no girl of nineteen can wholly resist the influence of an upright and imperious father; but it was an impression which Tom himself could have removed in five minutes, had not the circumstances of the moment (and, of course, certain personal limitations, such as are apt to defeat the best of us at

critical moments) forced him into a reticence and an apparent hostility, which puzzled the poor child and seemed to lend but too much colour to the misrepresentations of his enemies. Still, so much more inclined was she to trust than to suspect her lover, that his parting smile, his one tender word, and the warmth of the grasp he had given her hand when he was leaving her, had undone the effect of his previous bitter expressions, angry looks, and reserved phrases.

"He *does* love me," she told herself. "It *is* only the money!" And this refrain her heart had been singing ever since; the very agony of her suspicions caused reaction, and she felt happier in her returning confidence than she had been for days.

So that, calmer about her own affairs, Lilith was now able to think a little of her father's.

"I wonder," cried Lilith, "I wonder, papa, that you are going to marry this lady just because you are angry with us.

You do not love her, or you would be a little kinder to Tom and me."

Mr. Turold looked up astounded by this unexpected attack.

"Love!" he said contemptuously. "You children think of nothing but love! I sincerely hope Emily Gascoigne is a little older in that respect than you, Lilith, or I shall have a handful with the two of you. Matters are at far too grave a crisis for any talk of love or nonsense of that sort."

"You never called love nonsense when mamma was alive!" cried Lilith; and was leaving him. But he called her back, with a heavy sigh.

"I have something to tell you, Lilith," he said; and naturally he was a little annoyed with the girl and less inclined than usual to spare her feelings. "If you will stop thinking of yourself for a few minutes, my dear, and try to regard the catastrophe which is imminent from the point of view of my daughter, and not from that of the

self-willed *fiancée* of Mr. Thomas Palmer, you will have some chance of arriving at just conclusions as to the present unhappy condition of our affairs."

Lilith sat down obediently, and did listen and with the greatest surprise; but whether she was able to adopt the desired point of view is extremely doubtful.

Gilbert's face was white as he spoke, and he kept his eyes on the ground. He insisted very much on the word "conspiracy;" he said he was going to dispute the evidence, and that Lilith's lover, or rather her former lover, was an impostor. Finally he sighed, and observed that, in this sort of misguided world, the right side generally lost, while impostors were very apt to triumph; it would probably end in the seating of the impostor at Turold Royal and in his own emigration to New Zealand, accompanied by his daughter and Edward Vane.

Lilith listened with wide eyes, and said little.

"But if Tom isn't an impostor, papa? If it is true?"

"It won't make an honest man of him, my dear. Nor should I in any case allow you to marry the son of my brother Stephen. Before I knew of this conspiracy, I had valid reasons for dismissing Mr. Palmer. I will not pain you by enumerating them; but, since they remain unchanged, I will not permit your engagement to be renewed now, because this man has suddenly and improperly come into a splendid position. My dear, I cannot undertake to mince matters any longer. I wish you to marry your cousin Edward. I have always wished it, and I wish it more than ever to-day, when it seems only too probable that your father and yourself may be left at the mercy of, if not dependent upon, the charity of an unprincipled impostor. Any further communication, Lilith, which you may hold with Mr. Palmer will be, I beg you to remember, in direct disobedience to your father."

"I must think it over, papa," said Lilith, meekly; but she knew her eyes were sparkling, and she was afraid to look up lest he should see her smile.

She left him and shut herself up in her own room for a long time, holding her lover's picture in her hand and wondering why it had never occurred to her that one so like her own family must be a relation. And, as Lilith sat there smiling, good spirits continued to gain upon her, and she felt sure everything, everything was going to come right after all! If Tom had given her up only because he had lost his money? Well, any little gnawing doubts she still had on that subject she for the present was able to stifle. And if her father was embarrassed and annoyed and inclined to say silly things? Well, all that would pass. And would not the "valid reasons" he had talked about all dissolve the moment Tom signed his name "Turold"? Surely, surely their troubles were ended, and all was well!

The only point was how to reconcile her father to these extraordinary changes. Some plan must be devised, for Lilith felt really very sorry for him. She cared for the position of proprietor-elect of Turold Royal quite enough herself, to appreciate her father's sentiments under his prospect of deposition. If Tom would but come and "make it up" and talk matters over with her! The day passed and there was no sign of him.

In the evening, Lilith could bear it no longer; she wrapped herself up and made her way alone to Silcote Dene.

CHAPTER VI.

THE house showed signs of spoliation: the door-handle was unpolished; the leaves unswept; no smart footman answered the bell. Lilith was admitted by a kitchen-maid, overworked, over-anxious, and not at the moment over-clean, who stared at Miss Turold unmercifully. In the so-called breakfast-room, Tom was reading aloud to the blind man, the pair illuminated by the magnificent new lamp which somehow excited Lilith as with omen of rejoicing. It was some minutes before she got hold of her lover; but at last they were established in their old place in the conservatory, and by themselves. Lilith loosened her grey cloak, showing her pretty

neck; and Tom had her hand nestled comfortably in his, and had kissed her much as usual. This was all very pleasant; but most astonishing to him, with his less mobile nature and his more solid griefs. All day he had tortured himself, believing their love was ended; and yet here she was, sweet and almost gay as of old, unreproachful and unsuspicious. His heart leaped up, as that of the 'mariner worn and wan' who sets foot on a flowering island in the sea of sorrow.

"Tom, I came all alone. I couldn't wait. Do you know what I have heard, Tom? Can it be true? that you are my own cousin?"

"Hallo!" said Tom.

"There! that's exactly what I said!" cried Lilith. "I told papa I was sure you knew nothing about it."

"Yes, Lilith, I know. But only since yesterday."

"It is true, then?"

"Yes, I suppose it is true. Will you have me for your cousin, Lilith?" He spoke sadly. Would it ever be more than her cousin?

"Oh, I think it's quite lovely!" cried Lilith, jumping up in her excitement. "I feel as if I must laugh, I am so pleased. To think that you, whom they all sniffed at—I beg your pardon, Tom dear, but you know they did sniff—that you were all the time my own first cousin and the head of the family! It's amusing, and oh, Tom, it's lovely!"

Tom looked her up and down for a moment in surprise; and his gravity again sent a sharp thrill of apprehension through her, and a sense that something was wrong still. What? oh! what? what?

"I am very glad you are pleased, my sweet, for I doubt any one else is," said Tom. "Have you considered that I am plucking the throne from under the Princess Royal? Is that nice?"

Lilith's alarm showed a little in her blue eyes; but she tried to speak in the same tone as before.

"It wouldn't be nice if Mr. Anybody-out-of-the-street had done it. But you, Tom, that's different; and then——"

"What then, Lilith?"

"When it was mine, *I* meant to give it to *you*," murmured the girl, her heart beating nervously. But at this Tom's lips were on her brow, and that was reassuring. "Tom, don't—don't say any cruel things to me to-night!" cried Lilith.

The shadow in his eyes deepened, and it was some moments before they could go on, either of them.

"Don't you like it yourself, Tom?" asked Lilith, wistfully.

"If it makes *you* like me better—and yet, Lilith, why should you like me better for it? Yesterday I stood before you with some pride, the son of respectable people; to-day I'm the son of a sweep, disowned by his

family, a curse to every one he came near. I was happier as I was."

"My uncle can't have been so bad as that," said the girl.

"Because his name was Turold?"

Lilith made no answer; there was irony in his tone which made her shrink into herself. How strange that the name should seem so little to him! There was a pause, each conscious of a lack of sympathy.

"We see now why poor grandpapa wanted us to marry," said Lilith, presently, advancing towards the main purpose of her visit.

"It was jugglery," said Tom, rousing himself; "father and he shouldn't have laid their heads together to juggle. Yet it was a fine scheme enough if it had only come off."

"Papa is very angry about that scheme," said Lilith, looking up brightly.

"Ah! What does your father say, Lilith?"

"Not much. He seems bothered; partly about Mrs. Gascoigne, I think."

Tom smiled too.

"Lilith, you are naughty about Mrs. Gascoigne."

"But, Tom, papa was so angry with you for losing your money just when you were going to be married, and now the very same thing has happened to himself."

"I have no doubt Mr. Turold will extricate himself from the dilemma more gracefully than I did. You wicked Lilith! to laugh. These things turn men's hair grey, and women only laugh!"

"It is not wicked to laugh, Tom, for of all the unsuitable persons for papa to have dreamed of marrying, that silly, flirty little Emily Gascoigne is the worst."

Still neither of them could keep up the laugh; Tom scarcely tried, and Lilith's ended suddenly.

"Tom, do you suppose papa and I are quite paupers? Mr. Wilkinson told us every single thing was to go to the heir; to you, Tom."

"I feel sure that was not your—my grandfather's wish."

"We know what grandpapa *wished*," whispered Lilith, coaxingly; "it's just what I should wish too."

"What is that, my sweet?"

"Am I your sweet? Oh, Tom, if you do really love me, it all seems so simple!"

"Does it, my Lilith? I wish I could think so."

"It's horrid to think of papa being kicked out by his own children, Tom."

"Yes. It's disgusting."

"But *need* we do it?" His arm had slipped round her by this time, and his lips were very near hers. He was not like his old self; but Lilith told herself, as she nestled close to him, that it was, nevertheless, "all right." "Tom, you are the heir, and everything is really yours. But oh! if papa could have it, or seem to have it so long as he is alive, as grandpapa wished! If you liked to stay at the Court, so we could,

all together; or if you didn't like it, couldn't we have our pretty cottage in the country, just as we intended?"

"You tempt me, Lilith, with suggestions of an earthly paradise. But a proud man like your father would never agree to that plan."

"Wouldn't he, Tom? Yet I think it will break papa's heart to be turned out. And"—she smiled again, looking up into his eyes, which had gradually kindled into their old joy as he watched her—"what makes it worse, Tom, is that you, who are going to turn him out, have always been so naughty about Turold Royal; you have pretended to despise it——"

"Only the cauls," interjected Tom.

"—And it will break papa's heart to have to hand the place over to some one who doesn't value it, as he thinks!"

"All this Lilith said playfully, but her smothered apprehensions made her shy and a little pensive. To her lover she seemed

sweeter than ever. How could he give her up?

"I am not sure I shall be able to live at Turold Royal," said Tom, turning pale, and wrenching himself away from this softened mood.

"Then will you let papa stay, and you and I have our pretty cottage? That's why I came to-night, Tom—I mean, partly. I wanted to hear what you thought, if you had any idea like that, before ever papa and you met."

Tom was silent for awhile, the heavy clouds rolling back over his spirit, and the uncertainty reviving as to what he ought to do; what it would be possible to do; what would be fair at once to himself, and to her, and to his unhappy father.

"I should have to burn the papers," he said abruptly, "to abolish my claim, and to remain plain Tom Palmer."

"Dear me, Tom! I never thought of that!" said Lilith, startled. "Well, that would

be like grandpapa's plan, wouldn't it? It would come to the same, wouldn't it, whether you or I got it all in the end?" she suggested doubtfully.

"It mightn't come quite to the same; if your father married Mrs. Gascoigne, for instance."

"No, I see. But then, of course, Tom, papa wouldn't do that. *He* would know what you had done! Do you think papa has no sense of admiration and obligation and gratitude? Ah! you misunderstand him!"

"Oh, Lilith! Lilith!" said Tom, with emotion, "take care what you are saying! Do you like those words? And if I too acknowledge claims of admiration and obligation and gratitude, will you try and understand me? Lilith, if I had only you to think of it would be very easy. I believe I should burn the papers. It would be far better that you all, who care about them, should keep the cauls and the rest of the

rubbish," said Tom, the bitterness of his soul getting into his voice.

"Tom!" exclaimed Lilith, with a flash of indignation.

He surveyed her.

"If ever we quarrel, Lilith," he said slowly, "it will be about those wretched things."

"We are not going to quarrel," replied the girl, straightening herself; "but why do you tease me, talking in that way? When it is all fun I don't mind; but we are speaking seriously now."

"Certainly we are speaking seriously," said Tom, rising and standing a little apart from her. "I say I should like to leave everything with your father, Lilith; I know many things I value more than cauls, and locks of hair, and pictures, and old houses, and barren lands, whether they belong to Turold Royal or to any other place. We don't take the same view of those things, we never have done so; and I

repeat, if ever we quarrel it will be about them."

"I did not mean to annoy you, Tom," said Lilith, turning pale, and with her alarm rising so much that she hardly understood what he was saying, and merely thought he was scolding her.

"There is not much use in talking like this, Lilith. I have not thought the matter out; and until I have arrived at some kind of a decision myself, there is no gain in bewildering and perhaps offending you. What I wish you to understand is, that I must help *him:* the man I have always called my father, who helped me when *I* was in need, and who now is in great trouble and need himself."

"Oh yes, Tom," said Lilith, "you must help him. Poor man! without his sight and you not his son after all! If you like him to come and live with us, Tom," said the girl, impulsively, "I will not say a single word against it."

"I may have to do more than that," said Tom, in a low voice, looking away from her. "Lilith, I should prefer saying no more to-night. Will you let me take you home now?"

It was a moment before she either replied or rose to go. What could he mean? *more* than take Mr. Palmer to live in the little cottage paradise? a suggestion which, even as she made it, had sounded to Lilith Turold extravagant. And there flashed into her memory some words of his at their last meeting, which were exactly the ones he would have wished her to forget: "*I may have to marry Grace.*" Could that be what was in his mind, after all?

All Lilith's gaiety was now hopelessly extinguished, and Tom, putting a strong curb on himself because afraid of the influence of his love, did not offer to kiss her, nor say a single word to soften the effect of his sternness and reserve. They walked back together in silence to the Court.

Mr. Turold happened to be at the hall door

when the pair returned. He took no notice of his daughter, reserving his displeasure, but he called Tom to him into the library.

When, a few minutes later, the young man was withdrawing, it appeared that the hall was occupied by the dismal procession of undertakers bringing in the coffin; and he was ejected by the library's second door, which gave a roundabout exit through long corridors leading to the picture-gallery. Tom paused for a minute to think over what Mr. Turold had just been saying to him. He sighed. Considering their difficult position, Gilbert and he had till quite lately been surprisingly friendly, and the present rupture distressed Tom very much. He would have liked to conciliate Lilith's father; and notwithstanding the present ill blood he did not believe it would be very difficult to do so. Still he sighed.

The galleries were as usual slightly illuminated by candles in flashing silver sconces, which only served to make the dark tapestry,

the darker panelling, and the faded faces on the walls more than ever mysterious and ghostly. A servant was walking about on guard, but he knew Tom well and took no notice of him.

"All these things are mine," said Tom to himself. "I may as well look at them."

Among the curiosities, the thing most interesting to him was an old violin, long in the family, and which perhaps had first kindled the fiddle enthusiasm in the unhappy Stephen. Lilith had meant her musician to have it from his wedding-day, and already he had strung and played on it frequently. He had been taking violin lessons mainly for the sake of that fine instrument, and though a late beginner, was making the rapid progress of one with genuine musical talent. He sent the servant for the key of the case in which it was kept, and played on it now; wild pathetic strains at times rising into a wail not otherwise permitted to the nineteenth-century sufferer. It was a relief to him; he had

found a voice, a familiar, a consoler; and he played on, forgetting the hour, and where he was, and what he was doing. The servants heard him, and two or three congregated in the distance to listen. Gilbert heard him and looked in for a moment with angry eyes, remembering Stephen who had made fiddling disreputable in his father's house. Lilith from her bedroom heard him also; wrapped in her dressing-gown, she hid herself in the priest's hole, from which a tiny secret window looked down on the gallery.

At last Tom put the instrument away reverently and covetously, and walked about looking at the other objects of the much-prized collection; then he returned to the violin and gazed at it sadly. "That shall be the first," he said to himself. "They all know I value that."

END OF VOL. II.

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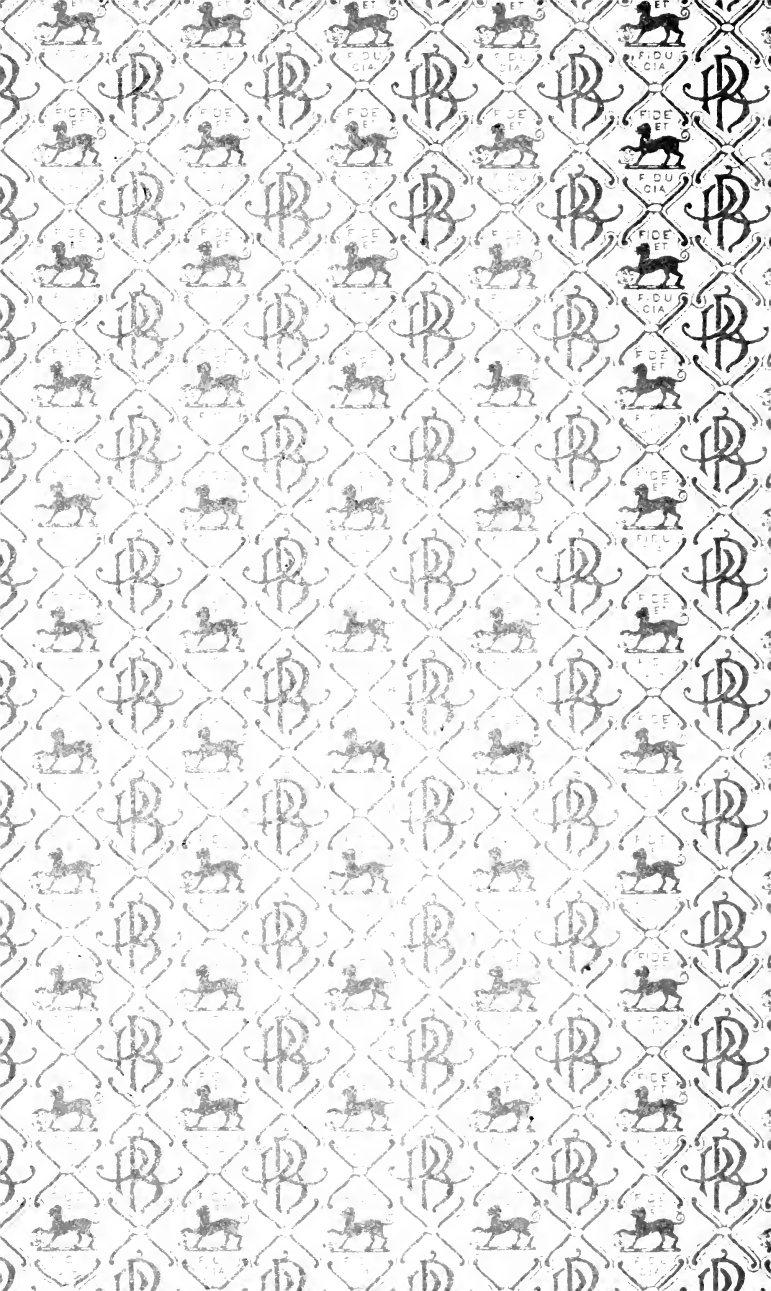

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